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SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 589. FOR WEEK ENDING APRIL 14TH, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

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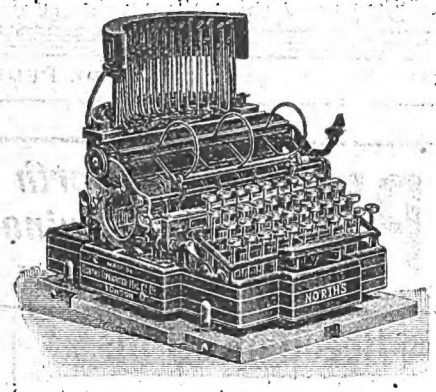

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EASTER BANK-HOLIDAY NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

No. 389.] [Week Ending April 14, 1900.

UNDER THE KOPJE.

A Story of Early Days in South Africa.

THE guard over the convicts who worked on the village roads looked up from the work wearily. He removed his broad felt hat and brushed the sweat from his reddened brow and his cheeks and neck, sunburnt almost to blackness. His Kaffir charges halted in their task, and their gaze followed his.

In the clearly-bright African air the threatening grey stone walls of the strong gaol, built commandingly on a high, big-bouldered kopje, looked close at hand, although a good mile away. Vryburg, the tiny capital of the British territory, lay to the left, hill-bound, silent, street deserted in the furnace heat, two rows of glaring houses with roofs and walls of galvanized iron.

Suddenly a quick-eyed Kaffir cried: "Ba-ors!" and pointed to the flagstaff in front of the gaol. With a grunt of relief the white man swung his rifle to his shoulder, and the Kaffirs threw their tools into the wheelbarrows. There fluttered up the head of the flagstaff a red flag, the sign to all outside working parties to return. But to-day work ceased at four o'clock, and the convicts were not marched directly to the gaol, but to a small lake beneath the kopje, where, twice a week they laved themselves. An instant change took place in the manner of the prisoners. They joked as they left their barrows in a shed, and trotted forward so quickly as to inconvenience their warder. A big, glossy, black man, his fine figure concealed by the prison clothes led the way, humming as he went, in low, sing-song, pleasant melody, a chant of war times. The others took it up; one threw his hands above his head, and skipped a step of the war dance.

"Easy, Sixpence!" growled the guard. "Easy, you big rascal!"

The big Kaffir in the lead slowed up, and turned with a grin to the white man, pointing a finger down a great red throat.

"Ba-a-as! Tabac!" he murmured.

The guard threw him a piece of tobacco, which the Kaffir cleverly caught and slapped into his mouth. At once the four or five other Kaffirs of the gang turned, and, reading good nature in their sentry's face, held out their hands mutely.

"Like babies for sweets," mused the Englishman, as he distributed the small luxuries. "They're a rum lot. Not one of them in for less than three years, and that fellow Sixpence a lifer, and by Jove, to see them laughing now, without a handcuff in the crowd of 'em, you'd think them schoolboys going in swimming."

They reached the little lake, shallow at the banks, deep in the centre, where a rushy, marshy island lay, more water than mud. The other working parties had foregathered, and Sixpence and his comrades, each armed

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with a piece of soap, soon joined the crowd in the water, swimming, spluttering, playing in the cool pond like boys.

The white guards, leaning on their rifles, stood at intervals round the bank. In the shallows a group of blacks danced a mock war dance, naked as monkeys, advancing and retiring with fantastic arms, crooning the hum of the impis.

Then it was difficult, almost impossible, for the guards to distinguish each his own men. In their convict clothes, each prisoner had some distinguishing mark; stripped, bobbing their black and woolly heads in the water, there was a tantalizing likeness among all the swimmers.

After a time they began to come out, one by one, and dress. Then a guard made his gang fall in and marched them up the kopje to the prison gates. Another followed, and another, until the village guard was left last to bring in his men. He was young and recently employed by the town; he could not talk the native dialects, and now he was much perturbed, for he could give to himself no explanation of the evident fact that there was none left in the water, and yet he was one man short.

The Kaffirs only chattered and laughed at him, enjoying the excellent joke. His eye anxiously searched the surface of the lake: there was nothing there. The rushes on the mud bank could barely have concealed a rabbit. Hoping that Sixpence, the missing man, had, in mischief—for the Kaffirs abounded in malicious tricks—slipped away with another gang, the guard hurried the others to the gaol, where he reported what had happened.

The warder of the gaol received the report without comment or rebuke, but promptly seized a rifle from the rack, left the other prisoners to be shut up in the cells by a few guards and took the rest at a run to the lake.

Meanwhile the gang had hardly left the band of the pond before, in the gathering dusk, there was a rustle among the scant rushes of the mud-bank. The mud stirred, and from the soft bed where it had been entirely immersed, leaving only the face to the air, arose the black form of Sixpence.

Silently he slipped into the water and swam ashore, as silently, his broad face stretched in a joyous grin.

He stayed for no covering, but crawled up the steep banks, stooped down as low as he could and ran away across the stony bluffs which surrounded the prison. He had not gone a hundred yards before the guards came running down to the lake and saw him.

The warder shouted to him to halt, but Sixpence ran more swiftly, yet not in a direct line. In a lightning-like zigzag course he darted from right to left obliquely, always onward, but in such short, swift tacks that he was an almost impossible target.

Five guns were aimed at him; five guns swerved momentarily right and left to find a mark before they were fired.

Sixpence waved his hand merrily over his head and disappeared beyond the bluffs, unhurt.

A Zulu servant led down two saddled horses, but the warder looked at the setting sun and shrugged his shoulders.

"No use," he said. "It'll be dark in ten minutes, and the black fellow will be hidden somewhere. I suppose you know he was in for manslaughter?"

The village guard hung his head.

"Oh, I don't blame you," said the warder. "Older hands than you can be taken in. I suppose he buried himself in the mud. Of course there will be an inquiry!"

There was, but a very short one, held in the gaol. In the middle of it a thundering demand for admittance was made with a knobkerry on the outer gate. The guard who opened the wicket led Sixpence before the court of inquiry, as cheerful and fat and with as broad a smile as ever.

He explained to the court that he had been home, had suffered from home-sickness, had enjoyed himself and was glad to be back again.

"Very little food over there," he said pointing to the north, "but plenty 'scoff' here."

So the bewildered officials took him in, to his great content, and, after giving him twelve lashes for the trouble he had caused, allowed the man who preferred prison to freedom to resume his former life. He never, after that, behaved

Swimming, spluttering, and playing in the cool pond like boys.

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otherwise than as a model prisoner, save once again, two years later, when he escaped and returned as before, taking his lashes with perfect good humour, and eating a big supper immediately after them.

He became a privileged character, an uncommissioned assistant about the office, until, in ten years, with African self-complacence, he looked upon himself as far above all other prisoners, and rather as a permanent, semi-official, permitted even on occasion to hold the keys.

Indeed, he had committed murder under the greatest provocation, and his good humour, his strength, and his faithfulness to the only home he had ever known, where meals were certain all the year round, made of him a favourite with the warder, to whom he attached himself as a kind of body servant.

Now, in those days, when the land was very young, and white men were few and white women were unknown, the methods of disciplining the unruly Kaffirs were primitive. Yet there was a greater intimacy and a closer intercourse between the whites and the blacks than there ever will be again. They fought frequently and were guilty alike of savagery, the one to the other. The white man, of course, was the victor always in the end, but the Kaffir, on the surface at least, bore little malice, and, having been knocked down, rose with some admiration in his heart for the man who thrashed him.

Sixpence had fought with his tribe and been conquered; had committed a crime and had been promptly punished for it. Far from sulking over his misfortunes, he was possessed with a spirit of respect for the invaders of his country.

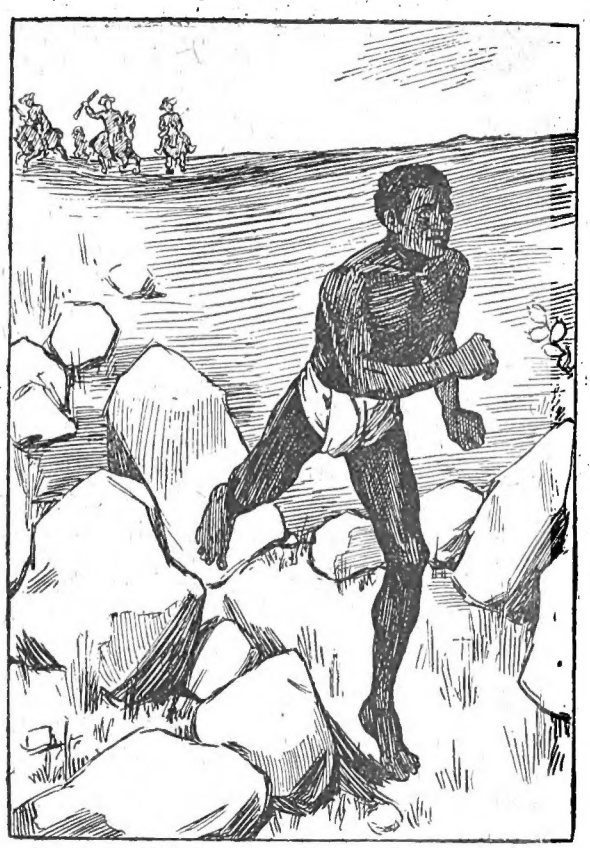
The only time the negro ever sighs is when he wishes he was white. Sixpence wished so hard and so often, and imitated the white people so earnestly, that, save when he thrust his broadly laughing face at a mirror, he was convinced that he was pretty nearly white. One man, however, was his ideal, his master, his demigod—the warder.

His attractions were such as to draw to him perhaps a dog, and he fed and thrashed Sixpence like a dog.

His accomplishments appealed to the convict. He was a crack shot with a revolver or rifle; he rode daringly; he could throw an assegai as well as Sixpence himself, and he had mysterious powers over pen and ink which awed Sixpence, crouching in a corner of the office. De Jough was an Afrikander; his father had been a discharged English soldier—his mother no one knew. He had won his wardership by ferocious fighting in the territory and by the respect his prowess gained for him among the natives. His sullen reticence and sudden furies had won him enemies; never had he called any man a friend. Therefore the life prisoner's doglike affection for him, after amusing him at first, in the slow movement of the months dragged from him a feeling as near akin to regard as is that of a school bully for the small boy whom he daily thrashes, but whom he will allow no other to threaten.

It was his privilege to select from the convicts a personal servant, and he chose Sixpence, even taking him away on a lonely hunt, even trusting to him to safely guide him home after a debauch.

Periodically he drank, and in excess, not in gaol, nor in the village, but in a lonely roadside tavern some miles away. Then for months he was sullenly abstemious, cruelly strict and unapproachable. Sixpence welcomed these intermittent frenzies of the warder with glee, for in them the man's nature swung about, and he was boisterously jovial.



But Sixpence ran more swiftly.

Then the Kaffir held high his head, and was filled with pride, because of the great cordiality and friendship the drunken white man evinced for the utterly unsophisticated and faithful black.

These outbreaks lasted about two days; then the Kaffir would lead his master's horse home, the warder slouching heavily in the saddle. Reverence, affection for something, however poor the idol, is good for man, savage or civilised. The raw Kaffir in his kraal reveres nothing, loves nothing. Therefore, though such a prison life would have degraded a white man beyond hope, it was good for Sixpence; he learned to love. He became human.

After such a debauch, one night when the sun had gone down, the two went homeward. The warder was singing, and abusing Sixpence, who tried to sing also, for not keeping the tune. They made a horrid noise, a hoarse and hideous bellow that spread far from them over the veld, until it seemed to disturb the solemn echoes of the distant grimly darkening hills, and silence, above the plains, the gentler voices of the southern stars.

Sixpence had his share of drink, and it took but little to turn his foolish brain. The moon, also, was not yet risen, and, for these reasons, as they passed along the trek and were unaware of all but their own discordant music, a man stood in front of them and blocked their path before his approach was noticed. It was the resident magistrate, an English civil servant, just out, and a patron of the warder.

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The latter, when he saw who stopped him, strove to sit erect and proffer a salutation, but the effort only unsettled his balance, and let him tumble sprawlingly in the roadway. He looked up in an almost sober spasm of shame, and by the starlight saw duskily the gentlemanly face of the magistrate looking down upon him with the deepest disgust.

"Again, Mr. De Jough?" the high official said, coldly, "in spite of warnings! This is too bad. It is impossible that this can go on."

De Jough staggered to his feet sullenly.

"Do as you like!" he cried, sulkily. "I can't stop it. I've been warder of the gaol for years, and no man can say I have not done my duty."

"I grant it," the magistrate answered, almost gently. "I grant it—but this cannot go on, you know."

"It's got to go on. It can't be stopped. Do you think I haven't tried to stop myself?"

The poor wretch thrust his face fiercely in front of the other's.

The magistrate drew back with a shudder from that horrid breath.

"I am sorry for you, but it can't go on. You are under arrest," he said firmly.

De Jough gasped, in sudden sobriety.

Arrest? Inquiry? Dismissal meant ruin. The official stepped forward in the night.

Sixpence was standing vacantly grinning at the horse's head, understanding nothing of what was said. In his hand he carried a knobkerry, which the warder, as a defence, always allowed him on their night expeditions.

De Jough snatched it, a heavy-headed club, studded with nails.

The magistrate slowly walked away.

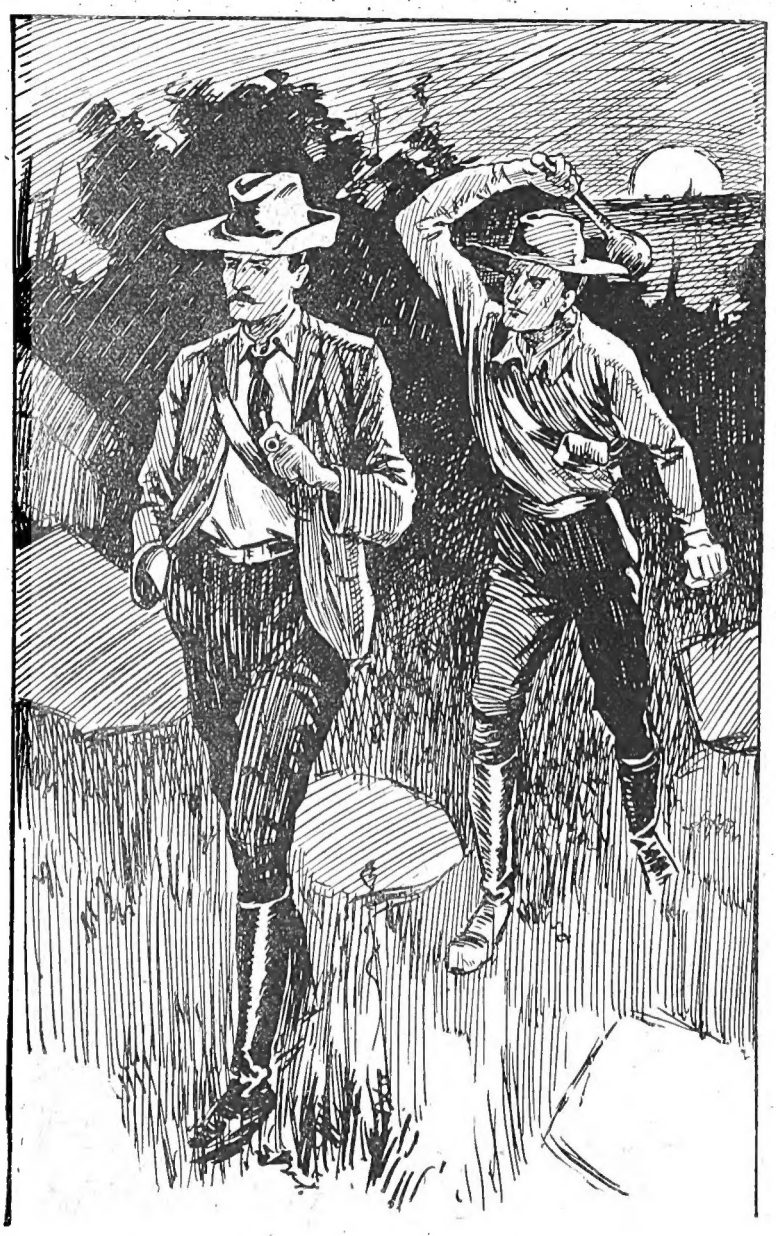
De Jough took a quick step after him, and the club crashed into the official's skull. De Jough dropped the stick as the man fell and stood still shaking with passion, staring at the body. Then the frenzy passed, but the trembling continued, the chill of awful dismay. He lurched to the roadside and sat down on a dead ant-hill. The night was quite still. The late, round, big African moon was slowly rising above the gaol walls on the kopje, more than a mile away.

The lonely trek was soundless of the feet of passengers, the low of waggon oxen, the lash-snap of the driver. In that lonely wilderness there was no traffic.

The Kaffir still held the horse, still stared vacantly, his drunken grin not yet dead on his lips. De Jough looked up and met his servant's eyes. He motioned to him, and called faintly for a drink. Sixpence went to the saddlebags and brought a bottle, and his master drank greedily. Then his gaze was diverted to the body in the path, and he was conscious of thankfulness that it had fallen face downwards, so that the eyes were hidden. He spoke in "taal" to Sixpence.

"Is—is he dead?"

The Kaffir slipped the horse's rein into his master's hand, went to the body and felt it, and stirred it with his foot as he might have done that of a horse—not from contempt, not from hate, but because a dead thing is a dead thing to a Kaffir, and little more.



De Jough took a step after him.

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"Ba-as," he said, in broken English. "Him very dead."

De Jough gulped another drink, and soon the trembling ceased. He was far from being a stranger to death by violence, and soon he was able to collect his wits and think, his face buried in his hands. But the face of Sixpence underwent a change as he resumed charge of the horse and looked down upon the warder. The black man's slowly acquired ideas of right and wrong, of the superiority of all white people to all black, were suddenly upset. This thing which the warder had done was what he himself had done, what many Kaffirs had done, but a white man—to another white man!

It was a surprise. Slowly Sixpence's brain awoke to the horrible fact that De Jough—his master, his model whom he had so desired to imitate, was no better than himself.

The warder looked up at last and saw the Kaffir's bewildered, saddened face, saddened as a dog's eyes are saddened when it misses something that is gone and cannot understand. Sixpence's ideal was dead; dimly and with dull pain he felt that there was little to choose between being white or being black.

"What are we to do?" the warder asked. "We cannot go back to the gaol."

Sixpence had not thought of that, but he at once understood. He had escaped hanging for manslaughter by a narrow edge, because the Kaffir he had slain had been in the wrong, but—how could the warden escape hanging?

"To the kraals," he said, his mind reverting, childlike, to its affection for and obedience to his master. He suddenly grovelled at the warder's feet, and began to howl softly, speaking in his native dialect, "They shall not hang the master; rather me, Sixpence the Bechuana. Am I not black and of no use? But the baas, how shall his children in the gaol live without him? But they shall not catch us! Know the way through the big desert, Kahlihari: I will show the baas the path to the kraals, and my people will hide us and protect us."

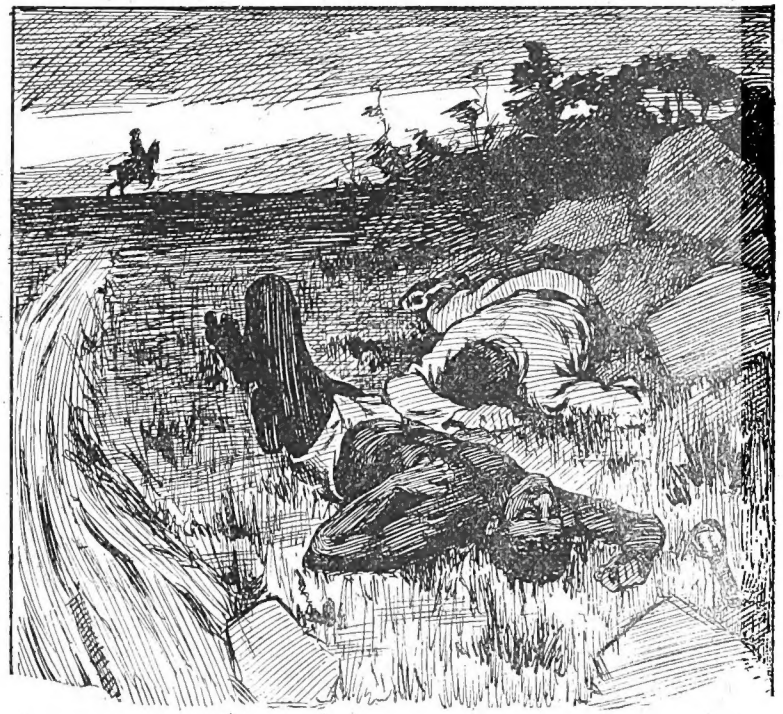
With a sudden prolonged wail he recollected the delights, the plenty, the comforts of his prison home.

"In the kraals," he moaned, "we starve; in the gaol there is plenty 'scoff.'"

For a moment the warder's face brightened. He knew as well as Sixpence that he would be hanged if caught, and he knew that he could trust himself implicitly to the Bechuana's guidance, but his eyes gloomed again. Would not hanging be better than that? To live among savages, to starve and be cold of nights and suffer from fever? Surely—some other way.

Something in the moonlight by the dead man had drawn the Kaffir's notice. The magistrate's left hand lay spread on the road, the fingers pointing reproachfully at his murderer. On one finger gleamed a diamond ring. A Kaffir, dying, would have strength to steal a diamond.

Forgetting everything else, Sixpence passed the reins again to his master, sitting on the antheap, thinking, thinking in a panic of fear and doubt.



Then the white man leapt upon his startled horse and galloped away.

Sixpence dropped by the body and seized the dead man's hand. The warder watched him, and as a lightning flash reveals the hidden things so a sudden, lurid thought banished the mist from his brain and showed him what to do. He considered rapidly. The convict had brought his horse to him and met him on the road. No one had seen them together that night, save the magistrate, and he could not tell. It could all be explained, easily explained, to the authorities. In his coat pocket he felt his revolver, a little bulldog thing, but quite, quite big enough. Sixpence knelt by the body. The warder sprang upon him and grasped him by the shoulders, so that the black man looked round at him in dumb amazement.

"Baas angry?" he asked like a child.

Then the look in the warder's eyes terrified him.

"Baas! The Baas!" he wailed, but before the wail died on his tongue the pistol had cracked close to the nipple on his black breast, and he fell back beside the magistrate. In his hand he grasped the ring; De Jough seized the blood-stained knobkerry and put it beside him. Then the white man leapt upon his startled horse and galloped away.

"A simple ending," he thought, with a horrid chuckle. "Of course he murdered the chief for the diamond; of course, coming home I found him rifling the body; he resisted, and I shot him. The poor beast—well, it's only a Kaffir."

In the moonlight, face up, they found Sixpence, when the guards from the gaol came down the kopje. His face was not distorted at all, but rather the reflection of a pained surprise, as he thought, in the moment of dying, that he had been deceived.

P. Y. Black.

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CARMEN'S FORTUNE.

CARMEN was the daughter of a Madrid clerk, whose earnings amounted to not more than two thousand pesetas (equal to about £80 a year). On this slender income her parents, who idolized her, brought her up like a princess. She was very pretty, and her mother was wont to look at her and exclaim:

"My daughter was born to marry a prince."

But this tender mother died long before the time for any possible realisation of her hopes, and soon after the father died also. Carmen was thus left an orphan at the age of twelve. The pastor of Santa Cruz was her uncle. He took her into his home and treated her affectionately, being seconded in this generous course by his housekeeper, a good woman by the name of Ciriaca.

Up to the age of sixteen years Carmen appeared like a little girl, and a very pretty little girl, too. But after that she developed very rapidly, so that she was reckoned among the most beautiful women of Madrid.

A young man of humble station, but of resolute character, began to frequent the street in which she lived, his eyes constantly directed toward her balcony. Carmen on her part would come out on the balcony, coquettishly attired, and return the glances of the enamoured youth, and smile. The pastor, having observed these movements, questioned his niece one evening.

"[illegible]"

"and that I wish to see you happy. Who is this young man who passes so often and smiles when he sees you?"

At this question Carmen turned as red as a pink and stammered an evasive answer.

"Come, come," remonstrated her good uncle, "tell me the truth. There is nothing to be ashamed of in inspiring an honest and pure affection. Does the young man please you?"

"Yes," murmured Carmen.

"And do you know his position in life?"

"No."

"Or what his name is?"

"No."

"Very well. Don't puzzle your little head. I will find out who he is, and if he is worthy of you, you shall marry him. We must not forget that you are poor, and the day I die you will be left destitute."

On the next day the pastor informed his niece that the young man was a journeyman tailor of irreproachable character. Carmen made no response, but her face became clouded.

"Why so serious?" asked her uncle. "You told me the young man pleased you."

"Yes, but a tailor!"

"My child," rejoined the pastor, "you are not a duchess. What you need is a good man who will love you and support you in a suitable manner. Now this young man seems to possess the requisite qualities, and you would do wrong if you reject him because he is only a working man."

"You are right, uncle," assented the girl.

"Well, then, he will come to-morrow to ask your hand in marriage. I hope you will not give him a refusal."

On the next day Carmen and the housekeeper went out to see if they could not find in some lottery office the number corresponding to the number of pitchers of water which the inn-keepers of Madrid poured every day into their wine. A statistician had ascertained this number by most laborious calculation, and he had demonstrated that the scarcity of water in Madrid was to be ascribed solely to this daily practice of the inn-keepers. Senora Ciriaca, it may be mentioned, had a firm belief that she would one day gain the first prize in a state lottery.

In the street an old gipsy woman came up to Carmen, crying out:

"Oh, my pretty little rose, brighter than the sun and fresher than the morning dew, you ought to have your fortune told. Will you let me tell it? I can divine the heart's secrets and penetrate into the future."

Carmen turned away disdainfully, and the old woman

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Immediately she approached the latter, exclaiming in accents of joy:

"Ah, noble lady, patroness of the poor fortune-teller, Heaven must have sent you hither for me to tell your fortune and that of this young rose here."

"Thank you," returned Ciriaca, dryly. "You are going to serve me the same way you did when you told me I should win in the lottery with a number corresponding to the number of steps in the tower of Santa Cruz."

"How! noble lady," exclaimed the gipsy, "you used the number and did not win?"

"Not a penny."

"Then I swear to you that if that is the case, you must have made a mistake in your counting."

"But I counted the steps, one by one, from the bottom to the top," protested the old housekeeper.

"But you ought to have counted them from the top to the bottom," returned the fortune-teller. "That is what I told you, and I have never deceived any one."

Ciriaca, whose intelligence was not of the highest, began to ponder what difference it could make whether the steps of Santa Cruz were reckoned from the top downward or from the bottom upward, and she ended by believing that she had been wrong in doubting the infallibility of the prophetess.

"Now then," resumed the shrewd old gipsy, "shall we tell the fortune of this blushing rose of spring?"

"Nous nse," interposed Carmen, drawing back her little white hand from the old woman's brown ones.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the gipsy. "My dear young lady, for fifty years I have been telling people's fortunes good and bad, and I have never told an untrue one."

Carmen turned to Ciriaca for advice, and the credulous old housekeeper persuaded her to place confidence in a science which she herself believed to be really infallible.

The fortune-teller examined the young girl's palm attentively.

"Here are some lines," she began, "which unite and form an O, which stands for office. These here form an A, which stands for alto (high). Oh, beautiful hands with veins of gold! You are going to marry a man who will hold a very exalted station in life."

At these words Carmen's eyes shone, while those of her companion filled with tears of joy.

"Ah, my dear child," cried Ciriaca, clasping the girl in her arms; "your mother was indeed right in saying that you would marry a prince. Your husband will be at least a Prime Minister."

The housekeeper and her young charge returned home in the highest of spirits, and immediately the girl declared to her uncle that she positively could not marry a tailor.

Then she betook herself to her balcony, musing on her future glory, and the poor young man was across the way looking at her and smiling. But she, instead of smiling in return, as on the previous evening, put on a solemn countenance and turned away from the window with a contemptuous movement.

Months and years passed and Carmen grew more and more beautiful. In her walks, at the theatres, at balls, and, in short, wherever she went she was followed by those young gallants who constantly hover round a beautiful woman. Often she heard declarations of love which she could not entertain seriously, because they were not made in a seemly and worthy manner, and

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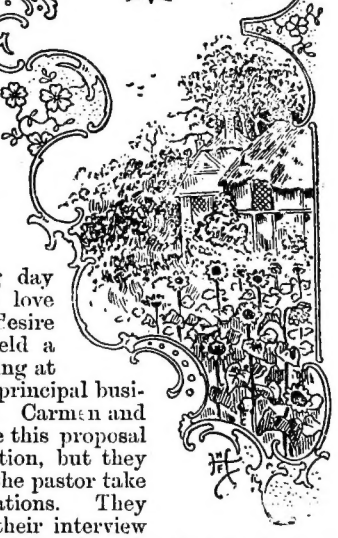

because her mind was constantly occupied with the high destiny promised her by the fortune-teller.

One evening at a concert an elegant young man paid her some compliments, and on the following day made formal avowal of love to her by letter of his desire to marry her. He held a very good position, being at the head of one of the principal business houses in Madrid. Carmen and Ciriaca resolved to give this proposal their serious consideration, but they were careful not to let the pastor take part in their deliberations. They had not told him of their interview with the gipsy fortune-teller, knowing that he had no patience with things of that sort, and they felt only too sure that he would joyfully accept the merchant's proposal without any discussion.

In the end, both resolved that Carmen would not be fulfilling her destiny by accepting the proposal.

Accordingly Carmen refused the merchant's offer, and some time after treated in like manner two other letters which came from young men of the middle class.

One morning, however, her uncle came to her with a radiant countenance, proclaiming that he had a great piece of news to announce.

"What is it, pray?" she cried.

"Well, then, my ambitious young lady," he replied, "your dreams are at length going to be realised. You can now marry a man who is a hundred times higher than a tailor."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl.

"I mean," he answered, "that the Count of Altos Humos, whom you know by sight, has asked me for your hand in marriage."

"Really!" exclaimed Carmen and Ciriaca together, carried away by a common emotion.

Now at last it seemed certain that the old gypsy's prediction was about to be fulfilled to the letter.

"And what answer did you give the count, uncle?" asked the young girl.

"I replied that I must consult you, but that if you accepted his offer I should be delighted."

"You did well not to pledge yourself," said Carmen.

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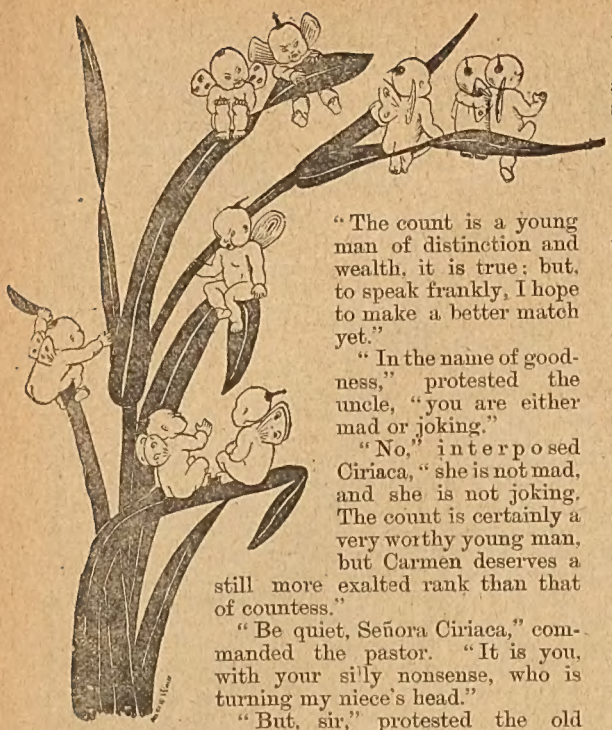

"The count is a young man of distinction and wealth, it is true; but, to speak frankly, I hope to make a better match yet."

"In the name of goodness," protested the uncle, "you are either mad or joking."

"No," interposed Ciriaca, "she is not mad, and she is not joking. The count is certainly a very worthy young man, but Carmen deserves a still more exalted rank than that of countess."

"Be quiet, Señora Ciriaca," commanded the pastor. "It is you, with your silly nonsense, who is turning my niece's head."

"But, sir," protested the old woman. "I am only repeating what your sister often used to say herself, that her daughter was born to marry a prince."

"Enough," interposed the pastor. "Carmen, answer me. I hope you are more reasonable and that you cannot seriously think of rejecting the incredible good fortune which heaven sends you."

"Uncle, let me consider the matter," replied the girl.

"Very well," replied her uncle, "I give you all day to decide. But to-morrow morning I must give the count an answer."

In the evening Carmen and Ciriaca held another consultation and decided that the count, distinguished though he was, was not the high dignitary promised by the fortune-teller; for after all he had no other employment than that of collecting his rents.

On the following morning the pastor filled with shame and indignation, went off to announce to the noble lover the rejection of his suit.

After this occurrence Carmen and the housekeeper expected every day to witness the arrival of an embassy empowered to ask the hand of the young lady in marriage. But days and months passed, and Carmen arrived at her twenty-fifth birthday without hearing of any Minister sighing for her affection.

Gradually she saw the number of her admirers diminish. She even reached the point when she could be present at a bull-fight without arousing the enthusiasm or even attracting the attention of a single torero. She began to lose confidence in the gipsy's splendid prediction, and Ciriaca had to use all her eloquence to reassure her.

"Do not be disturbed," she would say, "it is true that at twenty-five the freshness of a woman's beauty begins to decline, but what one does not obtain in early youth may yet be secured later. The one thing necessary is for you to show yourself as gracious and winning as you have been hitherto."

One day Carmen, after making herself specially agreeable to her uncle, asked him whether he had lately seen the count of Athol Humos.

"I saw him a few days ago," was the reply.

"He is not married yet?"

"No."

"Oh, what a silly girl I was not to marry him."

"Let us not think of that unfortunate affair," urged the pastor. "I cannot think of it without regret."

"And did not the count make any enquiry about me?" asked Carmen.

"None at all. You could not expect him to forget the injustice of your disdainful refusal of his suit."

"Yes, it was very unjust," she admitted.

"You acknowledge it, then," he asked, "and you would not refuse the hand of this noble Spaniard if he should offer it again, now?"

"No, certainly not," she replied, "and since you care for me so much, and are so concerned in my welfare, I wish you would have the kindness to speak to the count on my behalf, with all your tact and skill."

"What! Do you wish to ask him in marriage yourself?" demanded the pastor, in surprise.

"No," answered Carmen, "but you could, with all delicacy and tact, try to bring the count to the point of renewing his proposal. Come, uncle, I am sure you could do that admirably."

"Oh, these women!" groaned the good man in despair. "Well, niece, I will go and see the count, and invent some pretext for speaking to him adroitly about you; then we will see what will become of it."

On the following morning he betook himself to the house of the Count of Altos Humos.

"Ah!" cried the latter in greeting, "I am glad to see you! I have just bought a statuette for the church, and I should like to have your opinion of it."

"I am delighted at the opportunity of examining it," returned the other. "You know that I am a connoisseur in such matters."

The good man hereupon delivered a formal eulogy on the excellence of the piece of sculpture, which really was a work of merit, and at the same time sought an opportunity to speak about Carmen—which, however, did not seem to be a very easy thing to accomplish.

"Now that you are here," urged the host at length, "you must stay to lunch."

"That would give me great pleasure," replied his guest, "but my niece has very regular habits and is especially particular about my being in time for meals; while I on my part submit to this petty tyranny, knowing that women, who, like Carmen, rule their households wisely and graciously, are becoming rare."

The count listened gravely to this unexpected encomium of Carmen; then, resuming his customary ease of manner, he said, with a smile:

"Yes, certainly, Carmen is an admirable young lady."

"Thank you," cried the pastor, enchanted with the success of his little manœuvre. "I can assure you that my niece only asks an opportunity to show you her gratitude for the good opinion you have of her."

"Very well, then," rejoined the Count, "I am going to abuse her kindness."

"Abuse, Count. Can you even think it will be an abuse?"

"I should like to have your dear Carmen, who has such skill and taste, kindly make me a robe for my statuette."

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"With the greatest pleasure," exclaimed the pastor. "My niece is really very skilful, above all in things of that sort, and she will be most happy to perform the task which you intrust to her."

The good man returned home, well-pleased with the success of his diplomacy, and very happy at being able to report to his niece that the Count did not harbour any ill-will against her, since he asked a favour at her hands.

The years passed on and still Carmen remained unmarried; both she and the housekeeper had begun to lose faith in the predictions of the old fortune-teller, and Carmen would not have been averse to an offer of marriage from any of the suitors of the middle class who had at one time or other in the past proposed to her. She was even inclined to listen to the advances of shopkeepers and assistants, but none seemed to think of making a proposal.

She reached the age of thirty without any change of condition, and by this time her fear of becoming an old maid had acquired such a hold on her that she was tempted to use all her art to win the proposal which seemed never likely to be made.

One day Carmen went out, and by chance entered a little hardware shop kept by a young man who had been a choir boy in the church of St. Sebastian, but, by reason of his increasing years and size, had been obliged to give up the position. For want of a better occupation he had taken this little hardware business, and, as he heartily disliked it, he sought distractions in paying compliments to all the women, young or old, handsome or ugly, who chanced to enter his shop.

"May heaven bless the beautiful rose!" he exclaimed on seeing Carmen. "For a rose like you I would willingly go to prison."

"A truce to your nonsense!" returned Carmen. "Give me a box of sulphur matches—those that have the strongest odour."

"Do you want to poison yourself with them?" asked the young man.

"I don't know," she replied.

"If you are unhappy," he continued, "I will console you."

"How?"

"By marrying you."

Carmen began to talk with the young man, and became so engrossed that she forgot all about her sulphur matches.

On the next day Rufo—for that was the name of the ex-choir boy—closed his shop, and Carmen announced to her uncle that she had a lover, a fine young man, well known in the parish of St. Sebastian.

The pastor made inquiries about Rufo, and as he heard nothing but good concerning him he readily acquiesced in his niece's matrimonial plans.

"The young man," he said, "has no occupation, but we shall succeed in finding him one, I hope."

Soon after this the wedding took place, and Carmen had the satisfaction of walking along the streets of Madrid on the arm of her husband.

On the following day the pastor returned from the church radiant.

"I bring you good news," he called to Rufo. "The bell-ringer of Santa Cruz has resigned his place and you shall be his successor."

"Bless me!" cried Ciriaca, "a very exalted position; the prediction is fulfilled."

The next instant she went out to find the old gipsy fortune-teller, in order to ask her pardon for having mistrusted her science, and to get a lucky number for the lottery at the same time.

S. F. Amine.

Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

I.—HE MAKES SOME INTERESTING EXPERIMENTS IN MENTAL TELEGRAPHY.

MR. BOWSER was apparently reading his newspaper, and Mrs. Bowser was sewing, when all of a sudden he burst out laughing and slapped his leg. She looked up in an enquiring way, and he explained:

"It's a wonderful thing—positively wonderful, and I'm firmly convinced at last."

"What is it you find so wonderful?" she asked doubtfully.

"I'll tell you, and I hope you won't jump on me about fads. You've read and heard of what they call mental telegraphy, I presume? Well, I've been experimenting on you for the last half hour, and the results are really wonderful. When you first sat down I mentally telegraphed you to cross your feet. You did so. Then I telegraphed you to look up at the clock. You did so. Then I ordered you to scratch your nose, yawn and rock backwards and forwards, and you obeyed."

"What nonsense!" replied Mrs. Bowser.

"There's no nonsense about it. It is an idea as old as time. Why shouldn't one person's thoughts fly through space and be communicated to another? What did you do at exactly three o'clock this afternoon?"

"I went out to order meat for dinner," she answered, after a moment's thought.

"Exactly—ha! ha! ha! At three o'clock I telegraphed you to go out after meat and you went. Don't talk about fads. It is positively wonderful, and if you

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would only go in with me we would develop it to an astonishing degree. There you go; I just telegraphed you to raise your left hand and you lifted it to scratch your ear!"

"Is it possible that you really believe in such ridiculous twaddle?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Twaddle! That's it, of course! Anything you can't make out is twaddle. Of course I believe in it, as do millions of others, and it won't take me half an hour to convince you. I don't know how it will work on animals, but I'm going to experiment. There's the cat under the piano. I will telegraph her to come here. Just watch me. I lean forward and fix my eyes upon hers. I say to her: 'Come here—come here.' She gets nervous. She moves. She comes. She——"

The cat yeowled and spat and made a sudden rush over Mr. Bowser's feet, and disappeared through the open door and up the stairs.

"It—it wasn't exactly a success," he admitted after the flurry was over, "but that's easily explained. A cat hasn't a soul. She felt my mental influence to an extent, but couldn't make out what I wanted."

"Didn't you say you hadn't time to shave this morning," queried Mrs. Bowser as she took up her needle again.

"What if I did?" he asked.

"You'd better get down your razor and shave now instead of wasting your evening."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I've set out to make some experiments in mental telegraphy, and I'm going to do it if I had twenty beards waiting to be shaved. I needn't expect any help from you, of course, but I don't want it. I will now telegraph to Jones to run in here. At the office to-day we understood each other perfectly."

Mr. Bowser closed his eyes, contracted his thoughts, and a mental dispatch was sent to Jones next door. There was silence for three minutes, and then came a knock at the door.

"Ah! you don't believe, eh?" he exclaimed as he got up to answer it. "I think you'll call this something besides 'twaddle' before the evening is over."

The door was opened, but it didn't happen to be Jones who stood there. It was a man who explained that he had walked all the way from Portsmouth, and if Mr. Bowser could spare him a sixpence for a night's lodging——"

The door closed, and the conversation was abruptly brought to an end.

"Why didn't Jones come in?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as Mr. Bowser returned to the dining room looking like a man who had made an unlucky deal on the Stock-Exchange.

"That's easily explained. That confounded old tramp interrupted the message. He was probably standing on Jones' doorstep at the moment, and the dispatch couldn't pass through him."

"You ought to have sent a corkscrew dispatch, so that it could have twisted round him."

As Mr. Bowser glared at her, he felt his heels lifting up and his ears working, but by a powerful effort he restrained himself, and after a minute or two he said:

"I will now experiment on the cook. I will telegraph her to come up to the head of the stairs and ask you whether you will have oatmeal or toast for breakfast."

He sat down with his head in his hands, and there was silence for thirty seconds. Then there came a crash and a yell from the basement. Both ran down to find that the cook had pushed her elbow through a pane of glass while pulling down the window.

"Were you about to come upstairs?" asked Mr. Bowser, as she made her explanation.

"I was, sir," she replied.

"To ask Mrs. Bowser about breakfast?"

"No, sir. I was going to hand you the gas bill, which was left here this afternoon!"

"You see what nonsense it all is," said Mrs. Bowser, as they went upstairs.

"I see nothing of the kind," he sharply replied. "The trouble is that you are antagonistic. I'll get along without you, however. I wonder where that silly cat is?"

"You'd better let the cat alone. If you sit and glare at her again she may go mad. Better try Jones again."

"That's sarcasm, of course," he said, as he gritted

"She gets nervous. She moves."

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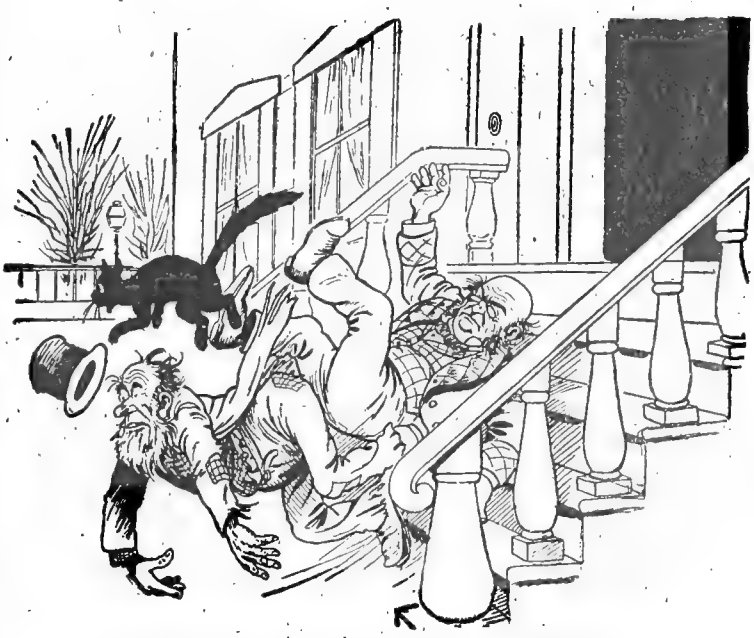
his teeth and glared at her; "but I'll fetch Jones over here dead or alive. You sniff and scoff at this thing, but that only shows your ignorance. Go out among your neighbours and talk as you do to me, and they'll put you down for an idiot. Why, woman, the theory of mental telegraphy is older than the hills; it was known 3,000 years B.C."

"But there is nothing in it," she persisted.

"But there is, and I'll prove it. Now you sit down and be passive, and I'll try it on Jones again. Don't antagonise me in your mind, but give me a fair hearing. Now I have my thoughts on Jones. He is sitting on the sofa. He begins to feel the current. Now my message is becoming communicated. He says to his wife that he is going to drop in here for a game of whist. Now he is at his front door. Now he is out on the step. Now he is at our gate. Now he knocks at the door."

At that instant the knocker sounded, and it was such a curious coincidence that Mrs. Bowser sprang to her feet and turned pale.

"Didn't I tell you so?" grimly observed Mr. Bowser, as he again started for the door.



Two men and a cat went rolling down the steps.

He pulled it open in the firm belief that Jones was standing there, but it didn't turn out that way. It was the same man who had called before—the man who "walked from Portsmouth." He had returned to see if there hadn't been some misunderstanding. It was possible that Mr. Bowser had understood him to say that he had lost his all on a horse-race or in card playing, and for that reason had refused him financial assistance. He was making a voluble explanation when Mr. Bowser interrupted with:

"You old scoundrel; I'll have you arrested for begging! How dare you come to people's front doors! Why, I'll——"

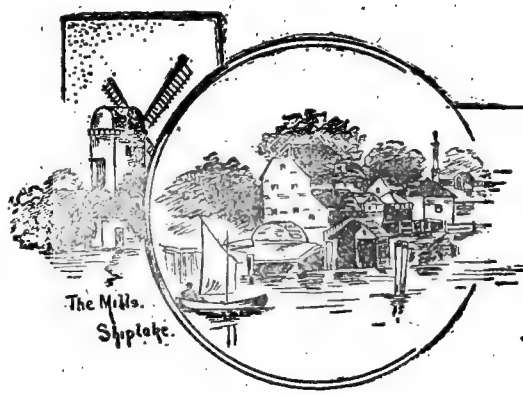
He pushed out of the door and seized the mendicant by the collar, and at that instant the cat came flying downstairs. Mental telegraphy had notified her that the front door was open, and that the promenading felines of the neighbourhood awaited her arrival to lead the grand march. As she went out on the jump she struck Mr. Bowser's legs, and the next instant two men and a cat went rolling down the steps. It was three minutes later when Mr. Bowser limped into the hall. The "tourist" had fled with his coat ripped up the back, and the cat had dodged the issue and scaled three fences.

"Well, why didn't Jones come in?" asked Mrs. Bowser, who had not left her chair.

Mr. Bowser did not answer. Reaching out for the banister he pulled himself from step to step with a clump! clump! clump! and she heard him kick open a door as he reached the landing. Then she knew that Jones and the cat and the cook and the performance was over for the evening.

M. Quad.

[Next Week: A "PROFESSIONAL" GIVES HIM SOME ADVICE ABOUT MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT.]



The Skipper's Ruse.

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"THERE is one of the fishermen at the back door, sir, who wants a word with you."

"Tell him to come in," was my reply.

"I did, sir, but he says he would rather not. I think something has happened, if I may make so bold as to say it," added my housekeeper.

"Very well," and I put my book aside to interview him.

Standing out in the darkness and rain was a figure in oilskins and sou'wester.

"Well? Who is it?" I inquired.

"It's me, sir."

"Who," I asked, peering out into the night. "Come nearer. Why do you stand out there in the wet?"

"Beg pardon, sir. It's only me—Bob Cooper."

The tone was somewhat thick and husky.

"Well, come inside. What is the use of standing there?" I said, somewhat impatiently, "when there is shelter as well as a warm fire here."

"I prefers to stand 'ere, if it's all the same to you, sir. The fact is I have a bad report to make—pore Jack Shipways is gone."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"Don't know northink, sir, except that 'e has gone, pore soul."

"Do you mean that he has been lost at sea?"

"Yes, sir. It's a bad job, but it's the way we all 'as to go."

There was the brittle swish of oilskins as Bob brushed his face with his sleeve, to wipe away the tears as I fondly imagined.

"Sorry to trouble you, but I thought perhaps you would come with me, sir, and help to break the noos to the wife. She don't know yet, an' I alwus thinks such noos sounds better somehow coming from the parson."

"Wait a moment."

I hurried off to put on my overcoat, and joined him in a few seconds. We walked down the street together. There was, I saw, a decided want of balance in the skipper's walk. At the same time there was a suspicious odour of rum in the night breeze. However, I thought the poor man was to be excused under the sad circumstances, and did not refer to it. Besides, it was Christmas time.

"When was Jack last seen?" I inquired as we walked along.

"Two nights ago. When I went below, he was at the tiller. Next mornin' he was missin'. It seems like a judgment on her," he added.

"Do you mean his wife?"

"Yes, sir. She's my own child, but she is a tartar—a fair tartar—a most unchristian girl when she gets into her tantrums, an' pore Jack's as decent a soul as anyone could meet. She has behaved bad, an' 'e was quite broken-'earted over the last row just afore we went away on this voyage. I said to 'er 'e may never come back no more. Now my words 'as come true; it seems jus' like a judgment. The whole voyage 'e 'as been down-like an' off his grub."

"You don't think he has committed suicide?" I asked quickly.

"Don't know northink, sir. It's a terrible calamity."

He did not seem very much overcome with grief himself I noticed.

"Well, skipper," I went on, "if Sally has a bad temper, you must admit she has a great deal to put up with at times, what with your drinking and his."

He winced at this home thrust, and for a time there was silence.

"Jack, I suppose, can speak for hisself," he resumed presently, "but it's all along o' this bad 'ealth that I enjoys which makes me take a drop at times—so 'elp me bob, sir. I ain't fond o' the drink—that's truth. Still, if she would behave 'erself, I would swear off the grog and chance my 'ealth on beer, an'. I know Jack would. Leastways if the poor chap was here to speak."

"Well, this is a bad business," I remarked gravely. "It will be a great blow to her, poor girl."

By this time we were near the little cottage. The skipper peeped past the blind.

"It's all right; she's inside, sir," he said, leading the way into the house.

I knew Mrs. Jack very well. Whatever her follies were, she was a good housewife. Anyone would have readily guessed that from the first glance at the neat little sitting-room. Everything spelt comfort. The cloth was laid for supper, a kettle sang merrily on the hob, Sally was standing by the fire attending to some red herring she was cooking, when her father opened the door and walked in.

"I heard you had got in three hours ago," she remarked casually.

The skipper prefaced his remarks by a series of short coughs to clear his thick voice.

"Here's the vicar, lass; cheer up. He's got some noos for yer—bad noos," was his salutation.

She had curtseyed to me, and now she turned with questioning glance to her father, who had flung himself

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down in a chair, and had begun vigorously to rock the cradle wherein lay his grandson.

"What is it, sir?" she asked, turning to me in alarm. "Nothink wrong with Jack, I hope?"

"I am sorry to say there is, Sally," I ventured. "Your father tells me he is missing! Pull yourself together, my good girl. We hope that he may have been picked up by some passing smack, but your father is afraid that your husband has been washed overboard."

"It's a judgment, Sally," grunted the skipper quite cheerfully. "I told yer it would 'appen. Now yer see my words has come true. Still, yer must cheer up as the vicar says."

It has often been my sad lot to break bad news to wives and children, whose husbands and fathers have been suddenly taken away, but never in all my experience have I seen anyone receive such tidings so calmly as Sally did. She sank down into a chair without a word.

There were no tears, no sign of any emotion whatever, save that her face became grey.

It is at such times that one feels at a loss for words, yet all the while I felt conscious of a sense of unreality about the whole affair.

"Father, are you tellin' me the truth?" she asked quietly, after a minute's silence.

Cooper seemed confused under her searching glance, and concentrated his attention upon a pipe he was charging.

"Do you hear what I say?" she demanded. "Are you speakin' the truth?"

"Arsk the vicar," he growled. "Didn't I come to you, sir, and say as 'ow pore Jack was gone?"

"You certainly gave me to understand that he was lost at sea," I said.

"Yes, an' I ain't tellin' no lies, an' I say it's a judgment for the way you have treated 'im, pore soul."

"I saw the smack come in, but the flag was not half mast," she proceeded.

"Have you reported the loss at the Custom House?" I interposed.

"Not yet," he replied uneasily. "Plenty o' time for that."

I did not like the way Cooper carefully avoided my eyes when they rested upon him.

"Of course, I 'opes the pore chap will turn up, so don't get too down-'earted, Sally," he said encouragingly, "but you're a widow sure enough."

"I am not going to be downhearted, for I don't believe you," was her frank response. "This is some trick—there is something behind it, I'm sure," she cried and her lips quivered.

"Where have you been since the vessel came in?" I asked, knowing that many a mischievous plot is concocted in the beer-house.

"Oh, I looked in at the Ferry Boat. There was a few friends in the snug, so I thought I would tell them the noos. They was awfully cut up, for they all liked him. It's only 'is own wife as hates 'im."

Again he carefully avoided my gaze.

"Cooper," I said severely, "it is my opinion you are not acting straight. Put on your sou'wester and come with me to the Collector of Customs. If what you say is true, you are liable to a penalty for not reporting it. On the other hand, if you are telling an untruth, all I can say is you are guilty of a shameful trick, and I will see if there is not some law by which you can be punished. Now, what have you got to say? If it is one of your jokes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Though she appeared to be quite calm, I could distinctly hear the poor woman's heart beating as she awaited his reply.

For a few seconds, Cooper gazed into the fire with a dogged expression on his face, then with a sudden jerk he threw off his oilskin.

"It's all right, Sally. Jack is no more drowned than I am. It was just a trick to frighten you into lovin' 'im——"

But the remainder of his sentence was cut short, for poor Sally had fainted, and we had jumped to our feet. There was no want of feeling now on his part, and his contrition was beyond measure. He threw up the window and shouted. Before the echo had died away, Jack, the missing man, sprang in like a big mastiff, and rushed to the side of his wife, whose hands he began to chafe.

"You've made a bloomin' nice mess o' things with your fatherly advice. I believe you've killed 'er," shouted Jack excitedly.

I found afterwards that he was waiting outside for the result of the interview, and had even followed the skipper and myself down the street—by arrangement, of course.

The father rushed out and returned with some brandy, which I administered to the girl. Presently the colour came back to her pale face.

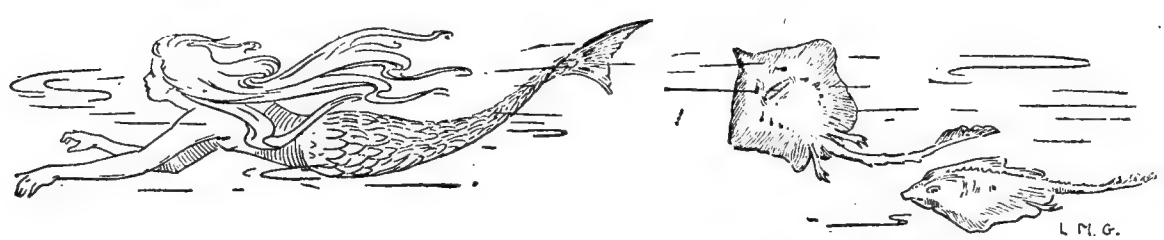
Both men assailed her in terms of endearment with keen anxiety depicted on their weatherbeaten faces, now all aglow with kindliness for the victim of their plot.

Their distress was piteous to behold, so I withheld my reproaches. No words of mine could have been stronger than their own expressed condemnation of their trick.

But it was some considerable time before Sally recovered consciousness. When she did, her first act was to put her arms round her husband's neck.

The reconciliation was complete, and I quietly withdrew.

Athol Forbes.



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HENRIETTE.

DURING a visit to Paris, many years ago, I spent an afternoon in the studio of the famous artist Florent, looking at his wonderful pictures and sketches, and as the light began to fade into twilight, we drew our chairs to the open window and sat looking over the roofs and chimneys away to the river in the distance.

"Now, tell me about the sketch of the girl," I said, after a long silence.

Earlier, while looking through an album, a sketch, done in water-colours, had attracted my attention, and I had asked whose face it was that had so attracted this great man. He looked at it sadly, I thought, and promised to tell me the story connected with it. The face in the picture was not beautiful, nor even pretty, but the eyes were full of expression and sadness, and the mouth, drooping slightly at the corners, seemed never to have known a smile, and yet betrayed a certain sweetness.

"As you could see," began Florent, "she is not pretty. But she is the only woman who has ever really loved me.

"I was twenty-three years old, extremely poor, absolutely unknown and happy. I worked alone in a little room that served me as studio, bedroom and reception-room, and gave lessons on small pay at young ladies' boarding schools.

"Among other places I went twice a week to the school of Madame Martinet, where I taught drawing. One day on entering the class I saw installed in the chair of surveillance a little creature who excited my sympathy at once. A young girl of about nineteen, with brown hair, big eyes and a sad mouth, her slim little figure dressed in an ugly brown gown which did not fit, she was picturesque in her utter forlornness.

"She was there to keep order, a sort of under teacher, but beyond 'Look out, mademoiselle is looking,' whispered several times, the girls paid no attention to her presence. When I left I bowed respectfully to her, and her face lit up with surprise and pleasure, as though she were unaccustomed to being noticed.

"She was called nothing but 'mademoiselle' in the school, and not for months did I learn her name. She seemed to avoid talking with me at the class, and I never met her elsewhere.

"One day in the early spring I was walking along the avenues of the Jardin-des-Plantes, when I saw mademoiselle coming toward me, followed by a mob of little boys crying:

"'Oh, ma'm'selle! Oh! Ma'm'selle!' as though the title were itself a term of reproach. To disperse the crowd was the work of an instant.

"When I turned to the girl she thanked me in a trembling voice, which sounded very near tears. I asked if I might not accompany her home, but she said it was not necessary. She consented, however, to sit down on a bench and regain her spirits.

"I seated myself beside her. She interested me. We talked of the school, of the badness of little boys, of the disagreeable features of our profession. I learned that she was an orphan, poor as I, more isolated even. She looked at me with her melancholy eyes.

"'You will be happy some day, M. Florent. You will be famous, perhaps rich. That ought to make you accept gaily the miseries that come with your present condition. As for me——'

"'Surely you, too, will be happy?'

"'I have nothing to look forward to,' she replied.

"Poor girl! My heart went out toward her. I assured her how much I had wished to make her acquaintance, and asked if we might not meet sometimes where we were as we were both more or less lonely. She appeared astonished, but consented.

"This incident determined a great change in the life of my little friend. As our intimacy grew, Henriette (that was her name) revealed to me a mind which was a treasure without price. She had the purest, rarest soul I ever had imagined. When with her I was perfectly happy. But my love for her was always as that for a sister; the thought of another love did not exist for me, nor did I suppose that it did for her.

"All the spring, summer and autumn I enjoyed her sweet companionship. In the winter we saw less of each other, though she came often to my *atelier*, inspiring me by her admiration and encouragement, to the best efforts in my work.

"One day in April I proposed that we should spend the whole day in the country, as I thought Henriette looked pale and tired. I chose the woods of Verrieres. The sky was blue, the air soft with early spring. I do

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not know what possessed me, but I spoke to her with unusual tenderness, saying more than I meant, showing more devotion than I felt. I asked her if she were content, and I shall never forget the look in her sad, little face as she said:

"'I am happy!'

"I knew then that she loved me, and my conscience was very heavy, for in my heart I felt nothing but the tenderness of a brother or a friend.

"Shortly after that time, I became the victim of a foolish infatuation for an extremely pretty girl. I always intended telling Henriette of Madeleine, but the memory of the day in the woods made me hesitate. I saw less of Henriette, spending my spare time with Madeleine, who, in time, came to return my affection and promised to marry me. I was young and the placid bearing of my little friend deceived me into believing that she noticed nothing in my behaviour, or did not feel my neglect.

"On the other hand, I was deterred from telling Madeleine of my friendship, fearing her railleries. Even then, I felt that she could not understand or appreciate a mind of the purity of Henriette's.

"One day when Madeleine was away I asked Henriette to have lunch with me at my studio. She came, for the first time in months.

"As we were looking through an album of sketches a picture of Madeleine fell out. Henriette gazed long into the face and then looked into my eyes.

"'She is beautiful,' she said. 'Who is she?'

"I could not tell her.

"'She has just a fancy head,' I replied, and she believed me. I was stricken with remorse. Drawing my chair close to hers I took her hands in mine.

"'Henriette, you are so good, so sweet,' I murmured when the door opened and there stood Madeleine.

"She was in a fury of jealous rage.

"'This is the way you work when you tell me you are alone!' she cried. 'And this, I suppose, is my rival. Let me congratulate you, monsieur, on your taste!' And she looked scornfully at Henriette, who had risen and stood pale and still, looking at the newcomer, in whom she recognized the original of the sketch.

"Without a word, with only a look which told me she understood everything, Henriette left us. In that instant I realized all that she was to me and the love that I had thought I felt for the woman still standing in the doorway melted away.

"I dashed out and down the stairs, crying 'Henriette!' She waited for me.

"'Do not speak,' she said. 'I have no claim on you. You are free. You need make no excuses to me. Goodbye, and may you be happy.' She was gone.

"I returned to Madeleine who was still in an ungovernable passion, and we broke our engagement.

"The next day I went to the school, where I learned that mademoiselle had departed the night before, leaving no address. I searched Paris for a trace of her, but found none. For ten years I did not give up the hope of finding her again. Then I became convinced that it was useless to hope further.

"I shall never see her again, tortured by me and lost just as I wished most to retain her. Her face lives in my memory as it looked the last time I saw her. The eyes were full of ineffable sorrow, her whole expression a picture of resigned love, her mouth the outward sign of all her wonderful sweetness. A rare nature, to be treasured and loved, to be mourned for ever if lost."

F. M. Stewart.

£250 * *

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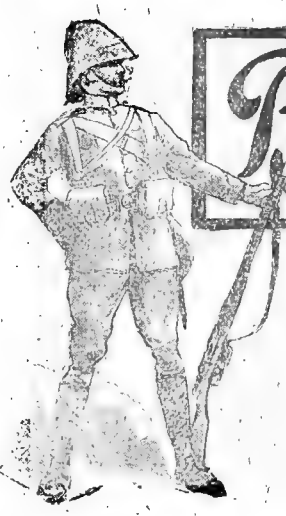

Briton or Boer?

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

INTRODUCTION.

For years past Britain and the Transvaal have been spoiling for a fight, and it was left to that well-known author, Mr. George Griffith, to write this strong and exciting serial nearly four years ago graphically describing a huge war between the two countries.

The story, coming so soon after the Jameson Raid, was read with unusual interest.

Now that Briton and Boer are in deadly conflict it will be interesting to read the story, and see how far the imagination of the author has actually come true.

SUMMARY OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—The scene opens on the Rand. It is the eve of Amajuba day, and a State ball is being given. To this comes Prince Paul Regna, a Polish nobleman, and his daughter, Princess Vavara. They are introduced to Dr. Leyds.

CHAPTER II.—Dr. Leyds returns to Pretoria to attend a midnight consultation at the Government buildings. The Prince's rooms are in the Grand Hotel opposite. By tapping the wires, which cross the street at this point, the Prince and his daughter overhear all that goes on, and telegraph the result by secret code to Europe.

CHAPTERS III. AND IV.—Amajuba day dawns. The Secretary accompanies the Prince and Princess to Krugersdorp, where, from the base of the Monument of Independence, the President makes a great proclamation. The Convention of London is abrogated, the absolute independence of the South African Republic is declared; the President unfurls a Union Jack and rends it to pieces. So the storm bursts!

CHAPTERS V. AND VI.—On the following day Major-General Carrington learns at Buluwayo that all the wires have been cut between Rhodesia and the south and east. He concludes that this is due to Boer hostility, and prepares to meet it. Meanwhile a powerful British squadron appears unexpectedly in Delagoa Bay, and Lieutenant Ferris is sent ashore to take possession of the telegraph station.

CHAPTERS VII. AND VIII.—A Russian squadron is in the Bay at the same time. The flagship *Navarin* fires on the British destroyer *Thrasher*. Admiral Dale takes this as an act of war. There is a battle and the Russian squadron is defeated and captured. Michael Ostroff seeks to escape in the *Sokol*. He is taken prisoner, and important dispatches are found in his possession. Admiral Dale calls a council of war.

CHAPTERS IX. AND X.—General Carrington's campaign in the Matoppo Hills ends in the defeat of the rebels, the remnant of whom take refuge in a kopje, which is surrounded. A Rhodesian trooper and a private of Lancers capture a Boer disguised as a Kaffir, and take him into camp.

CHAPTERS XI. AND XII.—The Boer-Kaffir tells General Carrington that the Dutch have risen against British rule all over South Africa. The Matabele surrender, and give up the disguised Boers among them. These are shot. As the force moves southward the scouts are met by a girl, who tells them that the Boers have invaded Rhodesia and are marching on Buluwayo. Meanwhile, Admiral Dale informs the captains of the squadron in Delagoa Bay that no help can be expected from home, and that he intends to take absolute command of the coast.

CHAPTERS XIII. AND XIV.—General Carrington commissions Major Bryan to organise the Matabele Legion, and lead it against a detachment of the Boers lying in wait in a group of kopjes farther down the road. Major Bryan discovers that the girl who has brought the news is his sweetheart, Madge Morrison. Her people have all been killed, and he determines to avenge them. He sends a party of Matabele under Umzilizi on ahead to parley with the Boers.

CHAPTERS XV. AND XVI.—The Boers are surrounded in the kopjes and thrown into complete confusion by means of dynamite charge carried into the air by rockets, and allowed to fall among the rocks. Sergeant Bethell shoots Commandant Potgieter at the Maxim, which is taken. Major Bryan turns it on the Boers, who have been driven into the road.

CHAPTER XVI. (*continued*).

As he spoke he fired three answering shots, and then he pressed his thumb hard against the spring and turned the barrel of the Maxim on to the groups in the road as a fireman might turn a hose on to a fire.

Macpherson's gun spoke at the same time, and in a few minutes all was over. A score or so of the panic-stricken Boers escaped the incessant cross-hail of the two torrents of bullets, but only to be shot down and stabbed by the ambushed Matabele. Within less than an hour of the rising of the first rocket the only remnants of the Boer Commando which had manned the kopjes in the hope of shooting down the British columns from behind the stones, consisted of about half-a-dozen men, who, terror-stricken at the effect of the first rocket-flight, had taken to their heels while there was yet time, and were already well on their way towards Tuli with a most amazing but not altogether inaccurate version of the "ghost work and trickery" which had blown up all the kopjes and let the *duivels* of hell loose on the Commando to devour it.

Major Bryan's lesson in night-attacks had been, at any rate, taught thoroughly by the time that he took his thumb from the spring, and, by ceasing fire, told Macpherson that he could do the same. But there were very few who had learnt it, and they were found to be so sorely wounded that it was very doubtful whether they would live long enough to impart it to those whom it most concerned.

It was still nearly an hour on the right side of midnight, so he took advantage of the moonlight to send Umzilizi to thoroughly explore the Boer positions and collect all the rifles and ammunition and unwounded horses that could be found. Then, after a couple of hours rest and an earnest consultation with his most trusted subordinates, he decided to take the tide of victory at the flood, push on with his whole force and the two Maxims along the dozen miles or so of road that separated him from Tuli, and fall upon the Boer position there in the mystic hour before the dawn.

About two o'clock the column was re-formed, the wounded Boers were placed on hastily-constructed litters borne by Matabele bearers, and the march was accomplished without incident. To his amazement, and perhaps not a little to his disappointment, Major Bryan found Tuli laid waste and deserted, save only for a few natives, who were placidly hunting about the smoking ruins of the hotels and stores, seeking diligently for what the Boers and the fire might have left behind them.

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Anniversary of Doornkop.

The events which immediately followed Major Bryan's victory, and the teaching of the first of several such lessons in tactics which the Boers were fated to learn, important as they seemed at the time to the actors in them, must nevertheless be passed over with little more than the bare mention of them, since it is now necessary to proceed with as little delay as possible to the narration of the far more momentous events which were about to happen in the south.

When he had satisfied himself that the Boers had definitely deserted Tuli, he came to the conclusion that one of two things must have happened. Either they had been suddenly recalled south, possibly by the news of a British invasion in force; or, believing the country behind them quite safe, they had destroyed the post and gone on up the road to Puri, to take their share in the attack on Buluwayo. It was just possible that they might have divided their forces, and that some of them might have gone viâ Maklutsi to attack the Mangwe Pass, but in that case he was content to leave them, since by the time they got there the fate of Buluwayo would probably have been decided.

He therefore made up his mind to press on up the Puri road, and, if possible, catch the Boers between General Carrington's forces and his own. After a halt among the ruins of Tuli, and a hasty breakfast on such meagre supplies as he had with him, he threw out a strong body of runners to scour the country on both sides of the road, and then set his column in order and started.

At Baboon Hill a much needed halt of twelve hours was made. Another day's march completed the long and toilsome journey, and just before sunset the Matabele Legion, headed by its gallant leader, marched amidst the acclamations of the troopers into Puri where General Carrington, thanks to Miss Madge Morrison's skilful guidance, had surprised one of the Boer columns and cut it to pieces during a night attack.

Here Major Bryan received the General's hearty congratulations on the brilliant success of his expedition, and had the still pleasanter satisfaction of telling his sweetheart that the promise he had made her by the Pioneer Road had been fulfilled to the letter—all of which and much more that it would be pleasant to describe in detail must unfortunately be left to the doubtless adequate imagination of my readers.

The next day the combined forces commenced their northward march, pushing on with all speed to Buluwayo. During the night following the thirteenth day after the first attack on the Matoppos the columns descending the slope

The Legion, headed by its leader, marched into Puri.

of the hills heard heavy and continuous firing from the direction of the town.

This, of course, instantly banished all thoughts of rest or sleep. It was well-known that considerably over a thousand Boers with two seven-pounders and probably machine guns as well had left Puri for the north before General Carrington's force arrived. Against the attack of such a force the defence of Buluwayo were terribly inadequate. It seemed, indeed, a marvel how it could have held out so long.

And yet when the explanation became known it was very simple. Overmatched as they were in numbers, the defenders of the southern capital of Rhodesia were men who knew no alternative to putting their backs against the wall and dying fighting. On the other hand the Boers were by no means as much in their element in attack as they were in defence, and there was no approach to the town save over ground that had been carefully cleared of every scrap of cover, and to cross this under a hail of bullets from rifles, Maxims, and Gatlings was a task that the peasant soldiers of the Republic were soon proved to have very little stomach for.

The shells came screaming through the air, and dropping in the very midst of their camp.

Hence, after several attempts, both by night and day, to get through the zone of fire, the Boers had contented themselves with holding the roads and cutting off the town until famine should compel surrender or reinforcements should come from the South. But now, instead of reinforcements, had come the news of the crushing defeats of Selindila and Puri, and the abandonment of Tuli in obedience to imperative orders from Pretoria.

The positions were thus reversed, and the Boers saw every chance of becoming the besieged instead of the besiegers unless they could break down the obstinate resistance of the devoted garrison of Buluwayo, capture the town, and then make a rapid movement southward on the Mangwe Pass and join hands with the force which by this time ought to have taken it, and so cleared the road to the Boer base of operations at Palapye—out of which they had driven King Khama with very little trouble and less ceremony about a fortnight before.

They had, therefore, made up their minds for a general attack on the wearied and weakened garrison, and the firing heard by the approaching columns was the cannonade preparatory to the assault, which was to be made at dawn on the following day—the Second of January, 1897, and the anniversary of the Jameson Raid.

But the assault was never made, for when the dawn came it showed them column after column of mounted troopers, infantry, artillery, Cape Boys, and well-armed, orderly Matabele debouching from the hills; and as soon as the light was strong enough for precise aim, General Carrington's mountain batteries began to speak, and the seven-pounder shells came screaming through the air from their rear, and dropping with most unpleasant precision in the very midst of their camp on the Tuli road.

At the same moment the fire from the forts round the now relieved town burst out with renewed vigour, and the would-be besiegers speedily saw that for them there was nothing but *sauvé qui peut*.

What followed was rather a stampede than a battle. The Boers, caught between the town and the columns under General Carrington, forsook their waggons, guns, and stores, flung themselves on their horses, and went away helter-skelter to the south-west to gain the main road before they were cut off from it.

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The astute General had not the slightest objection to their doing this. He knew that the sixty miles of road between Buluwayo and Mangwe were sprinkled with forts held by men whose Maxims and shell-guns would give a very good account of them as they passed, and, always supposing that the Mangwe Pass itself was still held by Captain Murray and Mr. Selous, there could but be two alternatives for the enemy—surrender or annihilation.

The relief of Buluwayo practically ended the disastrous attempt made by the Northern Division of the Boer forces to crush the British forces in Rhodesia, and take possession of the long coveted territory.

When all too late, it was seen that a gross tactical error had been made. It had been believed that the Rhodesians, impoverished by the rinder-pest and exhausted by the long Matabele campaign, would have fallen an easy prey to the commando of four thousand Boers, who had crossed the frontier on the night of Independence Day, and occupied Palapye, Fort Elebi, and Tuli, almost without resistance.

But, as the events just narrated showed, the victory of the Nuanetsi and the well-planned and rapidly executed operations which had followed it, had completely upset all their calculations.

He ordered a white handkerchief to be tied to a rifle barrel, and waved aloft.

Had it not been for Madge Morrison's desperate night-ride, and the timely warning she conveyed to General Carrington, everything might have been different. But now, at the end of a fortnight's campaign, Pieter Cronje, the victor of Potchefstroom* and Doornkop, who commanded the expedition, to his astonishment and disgust saw himself outgeneraled, and out-witted, and out-fought by an enemy whom every Boer had taught his children to despise since the dark day of Amajuba; and here he was, beaten at every point, riding for his life at the head of the remnant of his force, away from the all important position which another twelve hours would probably have given over to him.

At daybreak he had had about fifteen hundred men, two seven-pounders and three Maxims under his command; by nightfall he had less than a thousand men, many of them wounded, mounted on horses that could scarcely stand, with bandoliers empty and hardly a drink of water or a mouthful of food among them.

In front of him were the guns of Fig-Tree Fort; behind him were General Carrington's victorious troopers, and all along both sides of the road the Bush was alive with Cape Boys and the dusky warriors of the Matabele Legion.

Under such conditions no self-respecting Boer could be expected to fight, and as soon as the seven-pounders from Fig Tree Fort opened fire and began sending shell after shell into them as they straggled wearily along the road his men plainly told him that they had had enough, and that he must surrender.

It was a bitter thing to do, but there was no help for it. His angry thoughts went back to the wild, bleak slopes which stretched from Doornkop down to Hendrik Brink's farm at Vlakfontein, and to the scene by the little house on the veld, with the row of trees in front of it, where Jameson and his band of worn-out raiders surrendered to him. Now he was the raider—like them defeated, hemmed in, and worn out to the last stage of exhaustion even as they had been. That was only a year ago to-day, so quickly had time brought its revenge!

With a curse that came from the bottom of his heart, he recognised the inevitable, and ordered a white handkerchief to be tied to a rifle barrel and waved aloft.

And so Doornkop was avenged. The fire from the forts ceased instantly, and the cracking of the rifle-shots in the rear and along the two sides of the road quickly died away into silence as the bugle sounded the "Cease fire."

Sergeant Bethell, who was scouting along the western side of the road with the Corporals Dempsey and Hinton, keeping one of the divisions of the Matabele Legion in hand, was just in the act of "drawing a bead" on Commandant Cronje from a convenient elevation as the white flag went up. He lowered his rifle and looked round with an expression of the most profound disgust, and said:

"Well, I'm darned! Seems as though I was always going to get left in this business. Guess I took a bit too long over that sight; but, by gosh, I had him sweet!"

"What did yer want to look at the bally flag for at all till yer'd let her go? Who was to know yer'd seen it?" growled Corporal Dempsey. "Yer don't think either of us was going to give yer away, did yer, Old Ebenezer?"

This nickname, by-the-way, was a derivative from "Little Bethell." The New Englander stood about six foot two in his stockings.

"Not you, Cocky," he answered rather gravely, "but I guess none of us would think much more of ourselves for dropping even a low-down cuss like that after the white flag had gone up. Waal, anyhow," he went on in a more cheerful tone, "guess you Britishers have got the bulge on them this time. Maybe they won't gas so much about the colour of the British flag after this."

* It was this man who, in the War of Independence, disobeyed the orders of General Joubert, and deliberately kept the starving garrison and women and children of Potchefstroom in ignorance of the fact that an eight days' armistice had been concluded during which all the beleaguered towns were to be allowed to re-victual. In the end they surrendered—starved out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Prince Paul on the Situation.

It was New Year's Eve in Pretoria, and Mr. Secretary Leyds had snatched an hour or two from the ever-multiplying cares of State to accept Prince Paul Regna's invitation to dinner in his private room at the Grand Hotel.

Although their acquaintance was little more than a fortnight old, so far as the ordinary computation of time went, he was already quite on a footing of *ami de famille*, to use a convenient Gallicism. There was a something, which somehow he had never tried even to analyse, in the personalities of the courtly, high-bred exile and his daughter, which had attracted him as he had never been attracted before, and drawn him almost insensibly into an intimacy which a fortnight or so ago he would have considered impossible.

In the Prince he had found a man of perfect breeding, wide experience, acute perception, and frank and ready sympathy, and in the Princess, not only the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but a nature artless and innocent, and yet cultivated to a degree, that raised her infinitely above the women he was accustomed to meet with in the somewhat mixed society amidst which his lot was at present cast.

As he sat down to the exquisitely appointed table, it seemed as though some fairy enchantment had within the few moments that had passed since the door of the room had closed, transported him from the capital of the Transvaal into the infinitely more congenial atmosphere of one of the centres of the highest European civilisation, and for the time being he might have been ten thousand miles away from the Executive Chamber across the road where only an hour or so before he had been engaged in a battle of wits

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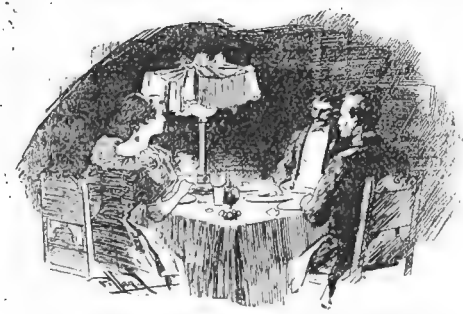
The Boers forsook their waggons, guns, and stores, flung themselves on their horses, and went away helter-skelter to gain the main road before they were cut off. Pieter Cronje, who commanded the expedition, riding for his life at the head of the remnant of his force.

with men who punctuated their arguments with puffs of rank tobacco smoke and frequent and copious expectorations.

The only attendant was the silent and smooth-faced Dmitri, who, as the Prince had assured him, did not understand a word of English, and hence, as their conversation was invariably conducted in that language, might as well



The Princess was sitting opposite to him, dressed to perfection.

have been a deaf mute so far as any possible danger of repetition was concerned.

Under the circumstances it was of course inevitable that after the elegant platitudes of the first few minutes the conversation should quickly veer round to the great subject which was then engrossing the attention of every one in South Africa from the Zambesi to Table Bay. In fact, any conversation, save on the one all-engrossing topic, could hardly have been anything but palpably artificial and almost wholly uninteresting.

It began by a most artless and naturally expressed question from the Princess, who was sitting opposite to him, dressed, as usual, to perfection, and looking her loveliest.

"May I ask, Mr. Secretary, whether there are any new developments in the situation that your necessary diplomatic reserve will allow you to tell us of?" she said as Dmitri silently and deftly removed the soup plates.

"There is very little of diplomacy or reserve necessary now, Princess," he said. "From now to the end it can hardly be anything but hard hitting and straight shooting. In fact, we diplomatists, if you choose to call us so, have finished our work for the present. The question between ourselves and the English has to be argued out on the battle-field, not in the council-chamber."

"Well," said the Prince, holding his glass of sherry between his eye and the shaded table lamp, "there could hardly be room for much more diplomacy after the President's speech at Krugersdorp. By-the-way, are you not beginning to come round to my way of thinking with regard to the Germans? Don't you think it possible that I may have been right when I told you ten days or so ago that their interest in the affairs of the Republic was a good deal more commercial than sentimental?"

"Sentimental!" echoed the Princess with one of her sweet, low laughs. "I should think that one might as well expect to find sentiment in an Englishman as in a German—music and beer of course apart. If Napoleon were alive now he would hardly have looked across the English channel to find his nation of shopkeepers."

"Yes, I'm afraid that is not far from the truth," said the Secretary, answering them both at once. "At any rate I am compelled to admit that one of two things must have happened; either they deliberately deceived us as to the arrival of the squadron in Delagoa Bay, or they may have got wind before we did of the arrival of the British ships, and kept very carefully out of harm's way. How very extraordinary it was that the Russian squadron should have come to such terrible grief as it did! What on earth could it have been doing there at all?"

"Goodness knows!" said the Prince, watching Dmitri filling his champagne glass as intently as though that were a much more interesting matter than the capture of the squadron which he had himself brought into the bay.

"The only feasible explanation that I can see is that someone must have betrayed your counsels in Europe, and Russia, knowing Delagoa Bay to be, as it is justly called, the Keyhole of Africa, thought there might as well be a Russian key in it as any other. But what I personally should like to know—merely, of course, as a matter of personal curiosity—is how on earth that English fleet dropped, as it were, from the clouds at the very moment when it was least wanted."

"Or most wanted, papa, from the enemy's point of view?" the Princess suggested with a spice of wickedness in her tone.

"I am glad to hear you say 'enemy,'" laughed the Secretary. "I should be sorry to think you have any sympathy with these English."

"You know I have told you that my mother was a Russian," she said, looking up rather sharply at him. "I hope by this time England has paid for that little victory either in Europe or Asia. By-the-way, Mr. Secretary, how is it that we can get no news from the rest of the world?"

"I'm afraid that is one of the consequences of 'the little victory,' as you call it," he said, looking straight down on to his plate. "I can only explain it by supposing that the cables are either cut or entirely in the hands of the English. That, however, was really to be expected. When the Germans failed us at Delagoa Bay every South African port would naturally be closed for the time being by the English warships, and, equally, of course, the cables would be at their mercy; but what I must confess does surprise me is that we have had no news from the Commando in the North since we ordered the evacuation of Tuli."

"That, I think between ourselves, was a mistake, if I may be allowed to say so," said the Prince. "I should have thought you would have had plenty of men on the eastern frontier to repel any possible incursion of the English Naval Brigade from Delagoa Bay without withdrawing your men from the North."

"Personally, I quite agree with you, Prince," said the Secretary, "but you know the Boers are not like regularly drilled and disciplined troops. An army should have no opinions save those of its generals, but in our commandos every man has his own opinion and doesn't hesitate to express it. I'm afraid, if the truth must be told, our worthy burghers took fright at the accounts they heard of the English ships. You see most of them are as ignorant as children about naval matters. Not one in a hundred—or perhaps a thousand—has ever seen a warship, and they seem to have got the idea that every one of them carries an army on board.

"Then, again, there is no denying the fact that the English sailors and marines are much more difficult fellows to tackle, even on land, than the English regulars, and they certainly got the best of our burghers in that skirmish at Kaapmuiden before they blew up the bridge over the Koomati and closed the railway to the coast. Our men didn't seem to understand their tactics at all. Of course, they can come no farther than that, but it must be admitted that the moral effect is anything but a good one."

"And have you settled your difficulty with the Orange Free State yet?" asked the Princess. "I am afraid that has been giving you a good deal of trouble hasn't it?"

"Yes," replied the Secretary. "It is quite needless for me to be anything but frank with you, knowing how entirely your sympathies are with us. As a matter of fact, it has delayed our operations for a full fortnight. If it had not been for that we ought to have had Kimberley and the whole line down to Beaufort by this time, and the Free State burghers ought to have been well across the Natal border; instead of which no concerted movement has been

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possible, and, except for Cronje's expedition to Buluwayo, we have done a great deal more talking than fighting."

"Still, I suppose that Basuto question is really a very serious one for the Free State, isn't it? I have heard that they have boasted of being able to put twenty or thirty thousand armed and mounted men into the field," said the Prince, looking inquiringly at him.

"There ought not to have been any difficulty," said the Secretary, not very good-humouredly. "There was no danger at all to be expected from that quarter, provided that our envoys did their duty properly."

"Or provided that other envoys had not got there before them with more liberal promises and better filled pockets," said the Prince meaningly.

"Ah!" said the Princess with a little shake of the head. "I see you are inclined to mount your hobby again, papa, or, perhaps, if one might use the expression, I should rather say your favourite bugbear."

"And that?" asked the Secretary, looking across the table at her.

"Oh, don't you know?" she said. "Why, Cecil Rhodes, of course."

And as she uttered the name of evil omen she lifted her champagne glass to her lips, took a little sip, and set it down again, saying: "There's confusion to his politics! You can hardly refuse to drink a toast like that, Mr. Secretary."

"I drink it with all my heart," he said, draining his glass at a draught. "I would give a good deal to know where he is and what he is doing just now."

"Hobby or no hobby," said the Prince, "I must say that I believe I am right in thinking that, in spite of his mysterious disappearance from the scene of action, he is still the most dangerous man in South Africa—or out of it, whichever he may happen to be. No one knows the power of money better than he does, and no one can use it more skilfully or more unscrupulously.

"Who, again, save the man who arranged the amalgamation of De Beers could have managed to transfer every shilling of his interests and those of his associates on the Rand to France without your hearing a word about it. Depend upon it, Mr. Secretary, Cecil Rhodes knew of your contemplated declaration of independence a good deal longer beforehand even than you knew of the Jameson Raid."

"And what if he did?" asked the Secretary, with admirably simulated unconcern. "After all, with all his millions and all his ability, he is a broken man, disgraced abroad and repudiated at home."

"My dear Mr. Secretary," said the Prince quite earnestly, leaning over the corner of the table and tapping him gently on one sleeve with his forefinger, "as one who has your cause very near at heart, let me earnestly beg of you and your colleagues in the Government not to allow yourselves to be deluded by any such false conviction.

"I hope I may remind you without offence that I had served my apprenticeship in diplomacy while you were still at school. In days that are now gone by for good it was my destiny to be intimately concerned in some of the most delicate and subtle intrigues that ever threatened or assured the peace of nations, and the most valuable lesson that my experience teaches me is: Beware of the man who is at the same time strong and silent.

"It is not your orators and mob-leading demagogues who really move the world. They only move the winds above it, which blow one way to-day and another to-morrow. No, no; believe me, Cecil Rhodes may well prove a more dangerous enemy to you than ever England herself. England by this time is probably hopelessly involved in European complications, and, saving for this mysterious fleet, unable to stretch out a hand to save her African dominions. But Cecil Rhodes is free, desperate, and without scruple. He has millions at command, and he is the man to use them to the last shilling to satisfy his ambitions or to crush his enemies—and you know, Doctor, he has no love for the Pretorian Government.

"I don't wish to play the part of an alarmist, but it is quite within the bounds of possibility that even now his agents may be buying ships and hiring men in Canada and Australia and South America, or wherever adventurers may be found, and I need not remind you that there is no law to stop him if he chooses to do so."

"In short, Prince," said the Secretary, with a perceptible harshness which he tried, in vain, to conceal, "you think we shall have to deal not only with the English in South Africa but with an invasion from over-sea?"

"I would rather put it," said the Prince in his most persuasive tone, "that I wish you to be fully on your guard."

The Secretary laughed, not very mirthfully perhaps, and said:

"I quite see your point, Prince, and it is very good of you to raise it, but we shall have South Africa before Cecil Rhodes, or anyone else, can land any force worth considering."

"I'm sure I most sincerely hope so," said the Princess, who for the last few minutes had been doing a good deal of thinking in silence.

"And I, too," said the Prince, "most earnestly. Come in."

The door opened and Dmitri came in carrying a bottle of champagne in an ice-bucket. In the other hand he held an envelope which, after he had put the bucket on the floor, he presented with silent deference to the Secretary.

"Pardon me," the latter said as he opened it and looked at the scrap of paper it contained. "Ay, I was afraid so! It is from the Executive. My presence is required across the way at once. Princess, and you, Prince, may I ask your indulgence for the misfortunes of my position?"

"How very unfortunate!" said the Princess, rising and holding out her hand to him with a gracious smile. "Still, in times like these, everything must give way to affairs of State. If you can rejoin us later on I hope you will."

As soon as the door had closed behind him, and they had sat down again, the Prince leaned back in his chair and said in Russian:

"Well, Dmitri, do you know why the Secretary was called away so suddenly? Is there any news?"

"Yes, Nobleness," he replied in his grave, slow voice.

"Do you know why the Secretary was called away?"

"Johannesburg has broken out into revolt, and there are rumours of a native rising."

"Ah," said the Princess, "that is news indeed. I suppose the next we shall get will be that twenty or thirty thousand Basutos have crossed the Free State border. Evidently something interesting is going to happen."

(To be continued.)

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humourous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Optimist," by Herbert Morrah, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. W. J. Bristow, 119 Stratford Road, Plaistow, Essex. Attempts for this week's prize may deal with ANY SUBJECT and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, April 16th. Post-cards only, please.

Did He Do Likewise?

A YOUNG curate was once asked to take a class of girls of about fifteen or sixteen, which had formerly been taken by a lady.

After a time the young clergyman consented, but insisted on being properly introduced to the class.

Accordingly the next Sunday the superintendent took him to the girls for this purpose, and addressing them, said:

"Young ladies, I wish to introduce to you the Rev. Mr. Chirp, who will in future be your teacher. I would like you to tell him what your former teacher did, so that he can go on in the same way."

Immediately a demure young miss of sixteen rose and said:

"The first thing our teacher did was to kiss us all round." W. J. B.

The Lady Didn't Smoke.

A LADY, spending the summer at a fishing village on the South Coast, asked one of the male residents:

"How far is it to Mr. Dibson's house?"

The sea-faring man pulled his top-knot politely, and answered:

"Just about a dog's trot, mum."

"How far is that?" the lady asked again.

The man hesitated an instant, as if searching in his mind for an exact measure of distance, and then replied:

"About as far as it would take ye to smoke an even pipeful o' terbacker, mum!" E. T. B.

Not Much of a Father.

IN one of our large drapery houses is employed a young man of diminutive stature and somewhat feminine appearance, although a tip-top salesman.

One day, not long since, a little girl was sent to the shop to make some purchases, and it fell to the lot of this young man to attend her.

She was a mere bunch of feminity, not able to talk plainly. She asked if he had any "totten flannel."

He replied that he had, and asked how much she wanted.

"I don't know," was the reply.

"Well, what do you want it for?"

"Want to make papa a shirt."

"Well, how big is your papa? Is he as big as me?"

"Big as you?" said the little maiden, "I should think he is; he wouldn't be much of a papa if he wasn't." E. N. J.

Didn't Do Him Any Good.

"AND remember," said the doctor to the young man, after giving him a prescription, "if you wish to get well, take only one cigar after each meal."

"Very well," said the patient sadly, and went away.

A few weeks later he returned to say that his health was greatly improved. "But I wish, doctor," he added, "that you could let me off that cigar after each meal. You see I had never smoked until you told me to, and I don't really think I am any the better for it."

F. L. S.

The Archbishop Again.

DR. TEMPLE, the Archbishop of Canterbury, entered an East-end church one night, and standing in a back pew joined in the singing of a Moody and Sankey hymn.

Next to him stood a working-man, who was singing lustily in tune. The bishop sang lustily also, but not in tune. The working-man stood the discord as long as he could, and then, nudging the bishop, said in a whisper:

"Here, dry up, mister; you're spoiling the show."

B. A. B.

An Appropriate Name.

"I WISH you'd stop calling that boy 'Willie,'" the old gentleman said irritably, as he looked up from his paper.

"It does seem rather odd to call a young man at college 'Willie,'" she admitted. "I suppose I ought to call him 'Will' or 'William,' but a mother ought to be excusable for holding to the diminutive as long——"

"'Will' wouldn't suit me any better than 'Willie,'" he answered. "I heard from some more of the Cambridge tradesmen to-day, and I want something appropriate. Suppose you call him plain 'Bill.'"

A. M.

A Son of the Sod.

THE rising generation of Irish boys seems to be fairly well informed as to their country's indebtedness to England.

An Irish school inspector the other day was examining a class in geography.

He had put a question regarding longitude, and on receiving a correct answer continued:

"And now what is latitude?"

There was silence for a little. Then an Oliver Twist-like youth, with a broad grin on his honest face, gave the reply:

"Please, sir, we have no latitude in Ireland! The British Government won't allow us any." L. S.

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He Thought So.

Husband (kindly): "My dear, you have nothing decent to wear, have you?"

Wife (with alacrity): "No, indeed I haven't; not a thing. I'd be ashamed to be seen anywhere. My newest party dress has been worn three times already."

Husband: "Yes, that's just what I told Bliffkins when he offered me two tickets for the opera to-night. I knew that if I took them they'd only be wasted, so I just took one. Well, I must hurry."

J. H.

Cheerful.

A lady visiting at Athlone, Ireland, was laid up for some time with influenza. When convalescent, her hostess suggested a drive, to brighten up her spirits, and invited her to say where she would like to go.

The guest selected Auburn.

Accordingly, a car was hired, and the Irish jarvey received his directions.

After a very long round the hostess declared he was not taking them in the right direction.

"'Deed, and I'm not, ma'am, for there's nothing there but the gorse. I'm going to take the stranger to show her the new cemetery."

W. G.

A Catchy Story.

Once, when in Paris, Napoleon paid a visit to a hospital for old soldiers. Among the inmates was an old man who had lost an arm. The Emperor asked him:

"Where did you lose your arm?"

"At Austerlitz, sire."

"Then, no doubt, you curse the Emperor and your country for your fate?"

"On the contrary," said the veteran, "for the Emperor and my country I would sacrifice my other arm."

"I can hardly believe it," said the Emperor.

The soldier immediately drew a sabre from its sheath and lopped off the other arm.

"A most sublime act of self-sacrifice," said the old lady who had been listening to the yarn, totally forgetting the impossibility of a one-armed man cutting off his remaining arm.

H. A. E.

Making it Worth While.

An Irishman walking along a platform, in counting some money accidentally dropped a sixpence, which rolled down a crack between two of the boards. The Irishman was much put out by his loss, trifling though it was, and went to town in a very bad temper.

Early the next day a friend, while walking by the spot, discovered the Irishman in the act of deliberately dropping a half-crown down the same crack through which he had lost his sixpence. The friend was, of course, much astonished at what he saw, and, desiring to learn why Pat should deliberately, to all appearances, throw away money, inquired his reasons, and was fairly taken off his feet by the following explanation:

"It was this way," said Pat. "It's yesterday I was passin' this way when I lost a sixpence down that hole. Now I rasoned thot it wasn't worth me while to get under the platform for a sixpence, but last night a scheme struck me, and I'm dropping down the half-crown to make it worth me while."

T. P.

Retort Courteous.

At a dinner party recently a dude found himself seated between two young men who had just started a merchant tailoring establishment.

"I—aw—have been placed between two—aw—tailors, it seems," said his dudelets.

"Yes," replied one of the young men; "you see, we are beginners, and at present can only afford one goose between us."

A. W. H.

An Awful Mouth.

A Lanarkshire farmer and one of his men were recently driving two carts of hay to the stable of a small country inn.

After they had arrived, and emptied their carts, the farmer proposed that they should go in and have a drink.

The carter assented, and in they went.

"What are you for, Jock?" asked the farmer, fumbling in his pocket for the necessary coin.

"A'll tak' a moothfu' o' beer," replied Jock, with great gusto.

"You'll tak' naethin' o' the kind," rejoined the farmer. "Ye'll get a quart here, but nae mair."

A. S. B.

A Sharp Answer.

A well-known bishop was making his annual round among the Sunday Schools of his diocese, examining the children and encouraging them.

One Sunday, after having spoken on the lesson, whose subject was "Jacob's Dream," he said:

"Now, is there any question you would like to ask me?"

For a moment there was silence, then a small girl on the front bench spoke forth in a timid voice:

"Please, my lord, if the angels had wings, why would they need a ladder?"

This question was so unexpected that the poor bishop did not know what to reply, and was racking his brains for an answer, when the eager voice of a farmer's little daughter cried out out:

"Please, my lord, I know."

"Why was it, my dear?" asked the relieved bishop.

"Because they were moulting."

A. R.

Waiting His Turn.

Two Yorkshire farmers lived together as partners. By-and-by they dissolved partnership and one moved away some miles distant.

After a time the son of his former partner paid them a visit. It was dinner time when he arrived. But for some cause or other they did not invite him to join them.

The farmer asked the boy no end of questions: how many horses they had, and how many sheep and pigs.

At last the boy said:

"We have one sow that has fourteen little pigs."

"Hey!" said the farmer.

"Yes," said the boy, "but there are only thirteen paps."

"Well," said the farmer, "how does the fourteenth do?"

"Just as I am doing now; sits and looks on while the others feed."

M. G.

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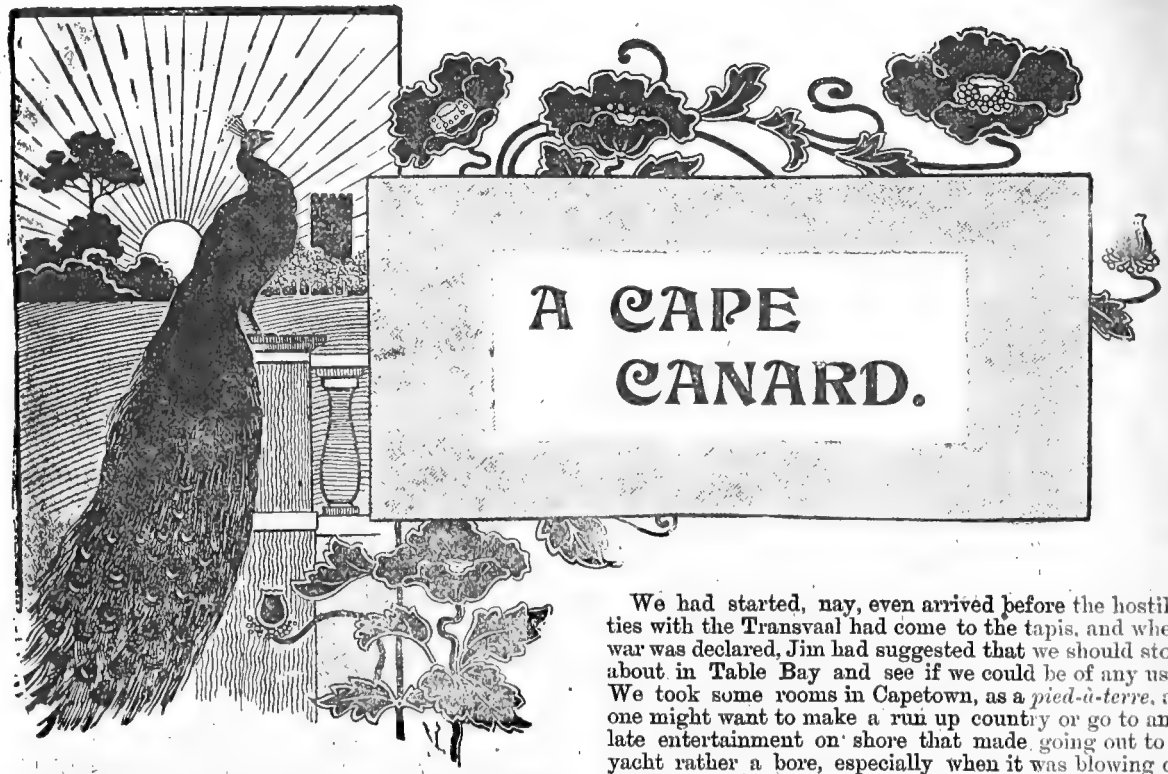

A CAPE CANARD.

TRUTH is stranger than fiction. In spite of this old saying I have heard cynics affirm that it entirely depends on the capabilities of the liar, or in other words, the author of the fiction. Well, however that may be, within the last few weeks a story got about that not only was credited by an enormous number of people in England, but even the greater organs of the press commented on it, and for twenty-four hours no one really knew whether the tale was true or false.

One enterprising evening paper published special editions at eleven in the morning, and announced that it was its own particular correspondent who had wired the news in advance of all his *confrères*.

It was to this effect that "Sir Redvers Buller, the brave and clever General to whom all our hopes of success in this terrible war were attached had been assassinated by a dastardly spy, shot at from an upper building as he landed at Capetown."

The War Office officials shook their heads when inquiries were made. They had had no such information and they spoke vaguely of the iniquity of publishing such reports.

"Reports," they said, "that were entirely without any official confirmation," and the clerk from whom this statement emanated, seemed to the excited brain of the interviewer to be positively clothed in red tape.

How this news got about seemed a mystery to all—some more immediately interested, even employed detectives to try and find out the origin. All failed, it remained for me, an individual who might vulgarly be described as being at the loose end of a rope to unravel this mystery.

It all came about through my accepting an invitation to go for a yachting cruise to Madeira and the Cape with my old friend and ally Jim Baldwin.

We had started, nay, even arrived before the hostilities with the Transvaal had come to the tapis, and when war was declared, Jim had suggested that we should stop about in Table Bay and see if we could be of any use. We took some rooms in Capetown, as a *pied-à-terre*, as one might want to make a run up country or go to any late entertainment on shore that made going out to a yacht rather a bore, especially when it was blowing or rainy.

By a curious coincidence we had chosen an hotel which was a favourite with several journalists and pressmen of all sorts. With the first whisper of war they seemed to crop up like mushrooms, and among them, an old college chum of mine, Tom Green by name, who at Oxford had gone by the name of the "Image," not because he was like "unto any graven thing," but because his imagination very often got the better of his sense of truth, and he would make the most extraordinary assertions which were afterwards proved to be without foundation.

We foregathered in the smoking-room the very day after the Castle Liner, with Sir Redvers Buller on board, arrived in Table Bay.

I could see he was dying to divulge something, so purposely maintained an air of indifference. At last after some fencing my diplomacy was rewarded.

"What a dreadful thing this is about the General," he began as he lit his pipe.

"I have not heard anything," said I truly enough. "What is it?"

"To tell you the truth, old chap, I don't know whether I ought to let it out, as no one seems to have heard anything here;" he paused, and puffed vigorously, while my curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"Oh, well," I said, "don't tell me if it is a state secret. I am not at all curious," I added grandly.

"It is not a state secret and I don't suppose it would be really any harm to tell you as you are not on the press, but please first give me your word you won't pass the news on."

"Of course I will," I answered. "What great oath do you want, word of honour, or 'bet a penny,' like the Eton boy."

"It is no joke," he replied gravely; "If it is true, I am

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the only correspondent so far as I can gather, who has got the news, and who has wired it home. I, who am usually thought to be among the small fry, as being in the employ of merely a halfpenny evening shocker."

"Well, here goes my solemn word of honour I'll not repeat what you tell me even to *The Times*," said I half jokingly, half seriously.

"The fact is," he said, knocking the ash out of his pipe, "I have been dying to talk it over with somebody, but nearly all the people in this hotel are either journalists themselves or friends of people connected with the press, so if you really won't let out what I am going to tell you, I will commence at the beginning and spin you the whole yarn."

I could see I was in for one of the "Image's" best, so I stopped him a minute while I rang for whiskeys and sodas for two and refilled my pipe as I sank into the chair I thought most likely to promote comfort, and, shall I whisper it, perhaps sleep. The drinks were brought, and my friend accepted his with a pre-occupied grunt of thanks, only waiting to see the man who had brought them, safely out of the room before he began.

"I was sitting last night in my bedroom, pen in hand, racking my brains for what on earth I could write or wire to my paper when I was disturbed by voices from the room adjoining mine. It was only separated by folding doors, so having keen ears I could hear every word as if it were uttered in my own apartment. Two men were speaking and this is what I heard.

"'It really was a near go. We nearly missed him; if it had not been for you we should not have got within range at all.'

"'I took two shots at him,' said the other voice, 'his being in mufti made him difficult to recognise.'

"The other chuckled (as I thought a sardonic chuckle). 'Ha,' said he, 'thanks to my quick-firer I got no less than six shots at him.'

"For some minutes there was silence broken only by a slight splashing noise as if of water, so I concluded my neighbours were washing.

"Presently the deeper voice broke silence again.

"'By jove!' it said, 'Sir Redvers Buller, that was a lucky shot for me. I got you!'

"'Don't think our friends the Boers could shoot much straighter,' answered the other voice, 'in spite of all the talking about their shooting.'

By this time the "Image's" voice was quite raised in excitement; he was imitating first one voice then the other, just as he had heard them from his room.

"My dear fellow," I began, but he waived me with a flourish of his pipe to be silent.

"Desmond," he said solemnly, "the conversation became much worse for not only had these wretched fellows shot Sir Redvers, but they had contrived to steal his body, and by some method known only to themselves, they were reducing it to I suppose—'nothing!' Listen to the rest.

"'He is a bit thick,' said the deep voice.

"'Oh that does not matter, we can easily reduce him, a little ferricyanide will do the trick.'

"'Have we enough with us?' replied the other.

"'Oh, yes, such a few grains is sufficient.' answered the more hardened of the villains, and I could hear him shaking up some liquid in a bottle.

"The conversation continued, but I could not pay any further heed to it. I seized my pen with feverish zeal, and wrote out my dispatch in cypher.

"'Buller murdered, shot by two Boer spies as he landed, mysterious disappearance of the body, more particulars to follow.'

"I put on my hat and flew, positively flew Desmond, to the post office, and sent it off. You see before you the only man who knows the true particulars of this atrocious crime, and I don't think I am premature if I say, I shall be considered the smartest correspondent in South Africa. My paper cannot fail to raise my salary, and I have no doubt I shall be asked to take on others."

The "Image" became positively inflated and looked at me in a pitying sort of way when I leant back in my chair and positively roared. When I recovered a little I gasped out in a jerky way:

"What is the number of your room?"

"No. 63," responded the "Image" looking not a little offended, "and," he added "I really don't see there is anything to laugh at. I think it is a terrible thing, the man on whom all England is depending, to be shot by those dastardly Boers. It is too awful."

"Quite so," I replied becoming grave, "if it were true, but my dear fellow, my room happens to be No. 64, and there is a folding door between it and the next room and the conversation you have just told was the facsimile of one between myself and our mutual friend Jim Baldwin."

"Don't tell me that he is a murderer," gasped the "Image."

"No," I replied, "not yet, but we are both ardent camera fiends, and we had the luck to be on board the yacht when the liner passed bearing Sir Redvers Buller and others to Capetown.

"We didn't shoot him as you have cabled to your paper, but we had the luck to get several snap-shots of him as the vessel went by. The remarks you overheard which sounded so blood-thirsty, were nothing more nor less than our natural exuberance at having got some good photos of the man whom as you say all England is looking to, to beat the Boers."

"But they said they would reduce him," the "Image" feebly expostulated.

"A photographic term, my dear fellow," I answered, "one reduces a picture when the plate is too thick."

Just then Jim Baldwin came in, a paper in hand.

"Talk of reducing," said he, "whoever wired this silly nonsense home will be reduced pretty quick I should think."

The "Image" sank into his chair with a groan.

"I'm done for," he said, "no one will believe a word I send after this."

"The wonder is," continued Jim Baldwin, not noticing Green's remark, "that the British public can remain such asses as to believe all they hear."

The "Image" squirmed and was completely finished by the waiter bringing in a wire from his office. Green threw it towards us.

"We want news not false reports," was the concise and somewhat curt wording of the message.

"Listeners," says an old adage, "seldom hear good of themselves," but in this instance the listener heard nought that was good for his paper.

The last I heard of our friend was that he had resigned his post as special correspondent and had volunteered for the front, hoping he would get shot, not by a camera, but by a Boer.

Maude Craigie Halkett.

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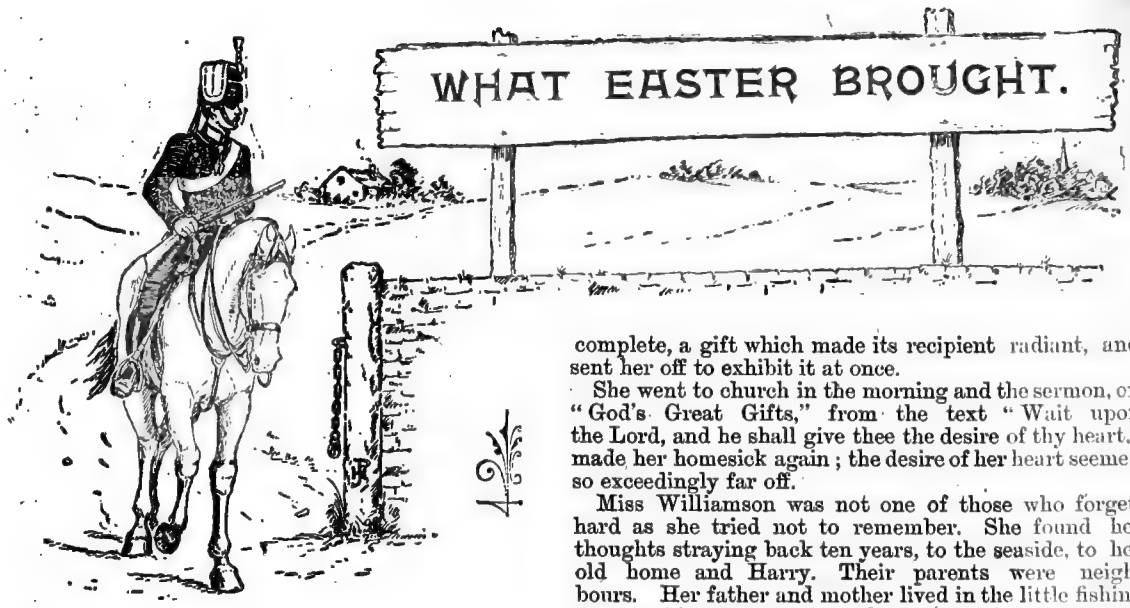

MISS WILLIAMSON opened her eyes to the sunshine with a startled feeling of having overslept herself; then closed them again at the sound of the chimes from the church round the corner.

For it was Good Friday, the one day, except Sundays, in the year which she could really and truly call her own.

She was that overworked individual, a popular dressmaker, going out by the day, and she sometimes wished that people would send for somebody else sometimes and let her rest.

Last Whitsun she had been in the country, sewing for dear life, in order to finish a belated bridal trousseau, and on August Bank Holiday she had worked until dark to accommodate a customer who wished to outshine her sister-in-law at a garden-party at the house of her husband's father, but on Good Friday not even the most exacting customer could ask her services.

And yet—was she glad it was Eastertide? The associations which cluster round the season make it a sorrowful one to those who have nothing left excepting memories of home and, saving for one brother, Miss Williamson was alone in the world.

Really, Miss Williamson told herself, she had no business to be low-spirited, she was a very fortunate person; think how many people were starving for the lack of work, and all that, she concluded vaguely as she finished her breakfast. The tea, which she made in her room, heating the water on a small gas stove, was excellent, she was particular about tea, and she felt better after drinking it.

Altogether she was in quite a cheerful mood, when the little daughter of her landlady came to see if she were getting up, and to bring an invitation from her mother to eat her dinner to-day with them. Dinner would be at half-past two. Miss Williamson thanked them very much and would dine with them with pleasure. Then she gave the little girl a small present she had for her, a stylish young lady-doll dressed in the latest fashion, with coat and hat complete, a gift which made its recipient radiant, and sent her off to exhibit it at once.

She went to church in the morning and the sermon, on "God's Great Gifts," from the text "Wait upon the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thy heart," made her homesick again; the desire of her heart seemed so exceedingly far off.

Miss Williamson was not one of those who forget, hard as she tried not to remember. She found her thoughts straying back ten years, to the seaside, to her old home and Harry. Their parents were neighbours. Her father and mother lived in the little fishing town and let apartments in the season; his father was the farmer who supplied them with vegetables and fruit. Harry drove the wagon which brought the daily supply to the cottages; they would have known each other in any case, but the morning interviews over lettuce and strawberries, plums and tomatoes, brought them closer together.

Every one approved of their engagement, and the day was fixed, when a great misfortune happened; her mother and oldest sister were drowned in a boating accident through want of care in the handling of the boat. This was bad enough, surely, but "troubles hunt in couples," and the blow seemed to affect her father's mind, he became almost childish; took to his bed and would have no one but her to wait upon him. To complete the roll of disaster, her brother suddenly brought home, as his wife, a girl whom none of his friends would have chosen, and the old man would not let his daughter-in-law come near him. To tell the truth, she had no desire to help Miss Williamson in her duties; she had married for a step up, and said plainly that she did not mean to slave, to please anybody.

"You see how it is, Harry," she said, with streaming eyes, "I cannot leave father, even for you."

"Bring him to our house with you," replied Harry; "there is plenty of room, and father and mother won't mind."

"No, Harry, thanks ever so much, but that wouldn't do any good. Father wouldn't be satisfied; besides he takes up so much of my time that I couldn't do my duty by you." And Harry had to submit with the best grace he could muster.

Unfortunately, he consulted the doctor who attended Mr. Williamson as to the probable duration of the old man's illness.

The doctor assured him that the trouble was chiefly hypochondria, and that he might live for years in the same state, or might possibly recover as suddenly as he had collapsed; at all events, the patient was in no immediate danger.

The inquiry would have done no harm had it not been that the doctor had a talking wife, to whom he

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told everything; so before long the whole neighbourhood was saying that Harry Burkin had been asking how long old Mr. Williamson could live. Of course, the story came to Miss Williamson's ears, to her intense indignation and still greater grief. Harry could not deny it *in toto*, and short of positive denial she would listen to no explanation.

There was a quarrel, a broken engagement, and Harry Burkin left the town, leaving his sweetheart well nigh broken-hearted, with only duty to console her; and sometimes duty is the best consolation one can have.

If he had been less impatient there would have been no trouble. Dr. Turner did not understand the effect which a broken heart sometimes produces upon the body. Mr. Williamson died before the winter was over. Harry Burkin came home as soon as he heard the news, but Miss Williamson had gone to the city with a cousin of her mother, and was obdurate; her filial affection found satisfaction in refusing to forgive her lover who had desired her father's death. She would not even see him, and so the affair ended.

* * * * *

Well, it was too late now, and she was silly to be dreaming of it. The sermon was ended and the solemn music of the organ roused her to the consciousness of things present and to come; she took part with the congregation in the rest of the service, and then hurried home to make a hasty toilet for dinner.

There was only a quiet family gathering. The *fiancé* of the oldest daughter, a travelling salesman in the employ of the wholesale house, was the life of the party. He was considered a very bright young man and a good talker. He was at his best to-day, and kept them all amused with stories of his travels, so that Miss Williamson had only to listen with a semblance of interest.

"By the way, Miss Williamson," he said presently, "I met an old friend of yours on this last round: Burkin was the name, H. W. Burkin. It was in Swansea. He was doing well in business there, and is quite chummy with one of my best customers who has some money in his business. The two were together at my rooms in the hotel, and he saw Min's picture on the dressing-table; I always carry it round to keep me out of temptation—guardian angel business, you know, Min—and he saw it. You know people say you two look alike, and the likeness comes out strong in that photo. It struck him all of a heap.

"'Excuse me,' he said, 'but will you tell me whose picture that is? It looks very much like someone I knew ten years ago.'

"'Certainly,' said I, 'that is my best girl. She is thought very much like a lady who lives in the same house, a Miss Williamson, from somewhere near Deal.'

"Well, it turned out to be the very same. He asked lots of questions about you, especially whether you were married. I gave you a good character and I expect you'll be hearing from him before long. Ross says he is a bachelor."

Miss Williamson controlled herself sufficiently to smile.

"Thank you, we were friends and neighbours when I was a girl," she replied, and in a moment more they were all laughing at a comical anecdote which the commercial was telling in his best style; it was no wonder he sold goods.

* * * * *

When the dinner was over the hostess excused herself soon, upon the plea of domestic duties, leaving Miss Williamson with the young people, so feeling herself not wanted she lingered but a few minutes. Back in her room she gave way and took refuge in that last solace of her sex, a good cry; her overwrought nerves demanded relief and would not be denied.

She was still huddled, a disconsolate heap, on the sofa when there came a tap at the door, which she recognised as that of her little friend. She sat up and hurriedly straightened her hair, trusting that in the dim light of the fast falling twilight the child would notice nothing amiss, sharp as she was.

"Come in," she called, as the knock was repeated.

"Here's a gentleman to see you," the child said, with the air of a person who confers a favour. "He says he is an old friend, so I brought him up."

Miss Williamson remembered that the one maid had been allowed to go to her home for the Easter, and that consequently the little girl would answer the door.

"Thank you," she said, "you may go."

Then she found herself face to face with a bearded man, whose eyes only were familiar.

"Well, Annie," he said, in the voice she knew so well, "here I am once more."

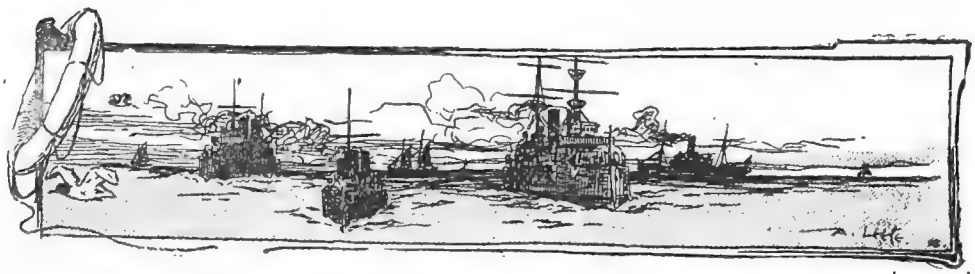
She held out both hands, with an eager gesture. "Oh, Harry, Harry," she cried.

A moment more and she was sobbing on his shoulder, while his arms held her as though they would never let her go.

* * * * *

And now, when Mr. Burkin wishes to tease his wife, he tells his friends that, after making him wait ten years, she helped him at last with the courting.

N. P. Hanby.



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A Non-Consuming Flame.

I SHALL offer no explanation of what I relate. I have no theories by which to explain the phenomenon, if such it be. I had theories but they one after another failed to account for the facts in the case. So I shall simply relate the bare facts as they are, shall vouch for them, produce additional testimony if desired and leave their explanation to some one more acute or at least better versed in the solving of mystery than myself.

To begin with: I am not a believer in ghosts, visitations, sorcery or any relic of barbarism of a kindred nature, and am not a member of the "Society for Psychical Research."

I rented a house in which to spend my vacation. It was simply an ordinary little country cottage. There was nothing about it to attract a second notice; just such a house as one would see in a few hours' ride along any road from Melbourne.

The only thing that attracted me to it was that it was in a rather secluded spot where I could take my little family and spend a quiet summer.

It stood on a small knoll in what is called the "second bottom," about a mile from the river. The ground was dry and well-drained, for only on the rarest occasions did the river floods reach it. I mention these particulars thus minutely as possibly suggesting some of the theories along which I sought an explanation.

The house had been empty for some time when I took it. When I offered to pay for our two months' occupancy in advance the landlord would accept only one month, saying that I could pay the other if I concluded to remain. I laid this queer business method to his generosity and gave it no further thought. While we were arranging our few belongings our nearest neighbour's boy stopped to say:

"Good morning," and made the enquiry. "Bought the house?"

We explained to him that we were there only for a short time and would be pleased to have him call.

"Well," he replied, "perhaps I might come some day, but I ain't much of a hand to be coming round here at night. Think you'll stay two months?"

We assured him that we would.

"Well, perhaps you will," he returned, as he trudged off towards home.

Several of the other neighbours looked mysterious and knowing when they learned that we had rented the "Copic house" for the summer.

"Pretty place, it's true; but, oh, well——" our neighbour boy's father remarked when I met him after we had been safely ensconced for a few days. I saw nothing in this at the time, but subsequent events made all clear to me.

Our sleeping apartments were above; the rooms were airy and all things pointed to a pleasant summer outing. One morning my wife remarked at breakfast about resting badly during the night. I had to confess to the same feeling. We attributed it to our fishing excursion of the day before, and thought no more of it.

One night a week or so later we had retired as usual, but try as I would I could not go to sleep. I tried all of the means with which I was acquainted to bring on drowsiness. I named alphabetically all of my friends; I counted up to a hundred slowly, but still sleep forsook me. I am naturally a heavy sleeper, but tonight this blessing was of no value. I was restless and nervous. In fact every nerve seemed on end and was strung to the highest tension. I felt no pain; a pain would have been a relief; it would have centralised the agony. When I laid my ear to the pillow, the lush, lush of my pulse was torture, and when I kept perfectly still in any position the very couch would vibrate to my heart beats. I felt if I could scream it would be a relief, but that would startle the household. I heard my wife turning restlessly on her couch.

Presently my little child, a boy of three, asked from his cot.

"Papa, tan I dit in bed wif you? I tan't doe to s'eep."

I told him "yes," and he crawled close up to me, all of a tremble.

I heard my wife turning restlessly again, and I asked, "Grace, what could we have eaten for supper? I can't go to sleep." She replied that she hadn't closed her eyes either, but that our supper had been the same as usual.

All was soon quiet and I again tried to woo slumber. I heard the clock in the room strike eleven; an hour of agony passed and I heard it droll out twelve. Its usually mellow sounds grated on my sensitive ears and the last stroke sounded through the room like a shout in a cave. One o'clock passed and only the child had

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found sleep, but it seemed more the fitful sleep of one in a fever than the healthy slumber of a child. The clock had just struck two, when I heard voices in the yard below. Recognising my neighbour's voice, I went down and found him, and his two sons and one of his labourers. "We just saw that your house was on fire and came over to give you any help we could," one of the boys remarked.

"House on fire!" I exclaimed; "you've made a mistake."

"Yes, 'twas," he persisted; "all ablaze on the roof."

"You must be mistaken," I replied; "I see no signs of it now."

"No," the old gentleman interposed; "it went out just as we got here; it always does."

"What do you mean? Do you suppose I'm daft, to believe such stuff! Don't you see it's all dark up there?" I replied somewhat warmly, for I thought they were simply passing by and wanted a little fun at my expense. So I went into the house and closed the door on them.

"All right," the boy returned, "you'll see."

I made some excuse to my wife for their call, tumbled into bed, and it was broad daylight when I awoke. We said little about the restlessness of the night, but I thought much. We experienced no more difficulty in sleeping and I had about forgotten the occurrence.

I was called to the village one evening a week or so later and was detained late into the night. I was cantering homeward shortly after midnight. When I was some two miles from home, with a heavy tract of timber between me and my house, suddenly the sky above and beyond the woods was illumined as from a great fire.

My horse stopped with a suddenness that all but sent me over his head. It was with difficulty that I urged him forward. I looked again. The fire was in the direction of my house. I whipped my horse into a run. When I plunged into the timber the sky beyond was red. In my dread lest it was my house I lashed my horse along regardless of bad road and low-hanging limbs.

When I emerged from the timber within a quarter of a mile of home all was dark. I rode more leisurely, but yet nervously, the little distance that remained. When I went up to my room I found my wife and little one suffering from the same nervous sleeplessness that we had experienced on the night mentioned before. I did not speak to her of what I had seen and, being tired from my ride, we were soon asleep. I said nothing to any of my neighbours for fear they might thing I had imbibed a little while at the village.

The second day following I met my neighbour and he asked:

"How did you sleep night before last?"

I looked at him and said:

"Look here, I want to talk to you."

I told him of my feelings on the night of his call and of my wild night's ride, also of my wife and child's restlessness on the same night.

Then the story that he told me, if I had been superstitious, would have made me fear to approach the house in broad day.

"The queer thing," he continued, "is that those in the house can't see it, but just feel as you have described. You fetch your traps over and stay with me for a week and you'll get to see it."

On some pretext to satisfy my wife we went to board at our neighbour's. We had been there about a week and I was occupying a room facing the house on the knoll, which was about a quarter of a mile distant.

One night, I was awakened by a knock on my door.

"Come, hurry up, and you'll get to see it," some one said.

I opened my eyes.

My room was all aglow! The light streamed in at the windows! I sprang to the window and beheld the roof of the house in a sheet of flame.

Hurrying into my clothes, I ran out and found the family all up, and watching it.

"Come on!" I said; "let's go!"

"No use," the old man said, but I had started and the boys followed.

I ran, never taking my eyes off the house. It was a peculiar flame, resembling more the burning of phosphorus than the fire from dry timber.

When half-way there, I saw the roof fall in. A shower of sparks shot up into the air and was carried away by the light breeze. As I neared the house the flames grew brighter!

They were now bursting from the window of my sleeping-room, that was! The fire was fierce, but strange to relate the roar made by a fire of such size was absent! It was doing its dastardly work in awful silence.

As I stopped to get my breath, and look about all objects shone as bright almost as day! I looked again! Was I sane or had my reason forsaken me! All was dark! I rubbed my eyes! There stood the house a silhouette against the sky! Its outline was perfect. "Boy's, let's go back," I said. "All right, sir! We're with you," and they showed their willingness by leading the way.

When we reached home I told what I had seen. All of the family, the old gentleman and wife, his two sons, the farm labourer and my wife had witnessed the same as I had. It could have been no hallucination on my part.

Against my wishes my wife had our things moved immediately from the house. We took up our abode with our neighbour and I spent the remainder of the summer outing in a study of that house.

I slept in it again and again, and, though I experienced the same uncanny restlessness, yet when I rushed into the yard to catch a glimpse of the flames I invariably saw nothing. My wild runs to the house, even though made on a fleet horse, always ended in darkness.

I followed every theory that offered even the slightest possible chance of a solution, but all led to the sphinx.

I learned that it was only during the summer months that the queer freak of nature, for such I believe it to be, was to be seen.

At the end of my vacation I gave up, the problem as much a mystery as when I had first witnessed it.

On our leaving the country to return to duty in Melbourne I made arrangements to be informed of any new departure in the freak, but the information received has added nothing to what I have already related.

I have simply stated plain, unvarnished facts at the possible expense of having my sanity questioned. I offer no explanation, for I have none.

I am ready to bow to the man who can offer a satisfactory one.

F. Watson.

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THE PAPER FOR THE TEA TABLE.

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The Brain Gymnasium.

In these competitions a prize of £2 will be awarded each week to the competitor whose attempt we receive giving the correct solutions of all the puzzles. If more than one is absolutely correct the prize of £2 will be given to the first correct attempt dealt with.

If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award in addition to the above, either ten of our silver plated pencil-cases or ten popular six shilling novels to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one sheet of paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, Short Stories, 18 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C., by Monday, April 23rd, 1900.

No. 88.

Form a square word with words signifying:

"To let fall"; "A species of deer"; "At one time"; "To skin."

No. 89.

To the letters A A A L M, add those contained in the names of two vessels, the one formed by changing the head of the other, so that a gigantic undertaking can be read.

No. 90.

Re-arrange the following letters so that two word-squares are formed, the connecting word of which is a dog:

A A A A A A C D E E E E F F F I I
L L L L L L M M R S S S T

No. 91.

My first is in dough, but not in row:
My second in funny you will find;
My third is in need, but not in plead;
My fourth, you see, is always in climbed:
My fifth a portion is of yearning;
My whole is very slow at learning.

No. 92.

A	C	X	B	Y	Z
B	F	E	D	C	A

* * * * * *

For the above cryptogram, the alphabet has been numbered according to a certain rule. If in place of the above letters their cryptogram number be inserted, it will be found that in each case the second row is exactly twice the value of the first. Add the two lines together, and put the corresponding ordinary alphabet letter represented by the figure. A word signifying "a prank" will then be found.

No. 93.

Let economical polity prate of it
As an advantage—my terrible FIRST;
We of this latter day—having a hate of it,
Long for the end of it—custom accurst.

Science will FIRST destroy, surely, in time to come,
Bring to dead SECOND all who engage
In FIRST; and SECOND in durance the wight, who'd drum
Fools to this folly, so sad to the sage.

Yes, science the WHOLE is, who from the FIRST should free us soon,
And seeming cruel, would end being kind;
Such a WHOLE, though in past ages not thought a boon,
Would now prove a blessing to weary mankind.

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

Nos. 64 to 69.

The prize of £2 has been awarded to Mr. Charles Harwood, of 15 Colfe Road, Forest Hill, S.E., whose solution was the first correct one dealt with.

A copy of "The Virgin of the Sun," by George Griffiths, has been sent to each of the following:

Miss E. Short, 18 Brynhenlog Terrace, Ebbw Vale, Mon.
J. H. Cockerill, 17 Essex Street, Kingsland Road, London, N.
O. Frankenstein, 1 St. James's Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W.
W. J. Green, 161 Brook Street, Kennington, S.E.
M. W. Daws, 21 Parliament Street, Hull.
E. Hutchings, 4 Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, W.C.
H. B. Thompson, Bracknell, Berks.
I. M. Child, 46 Wilson Street, Derby.
W. C. Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport.
D. G. Jetley, 3 Cantwell Road, Plumstead.

SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES.

Nos. 70 to 75.

No. 70. Sir Walter Scott—Marmion.

No. 71. Camp-bell; Words-worth; Dry-den; Long-fellow; Butler.

No. 72. It is on or it is in it.

No. 73. "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good."

No. 74. Severn. Shilling, enemy, vase, elephant, rabbit, navvy.

No. 75. "He that complies against his will is of his own opinion still."

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THEY MUST AGREE.

As to matters that have no practical outcome it is of no consequence whether we agree or not. The earth may be, as some say it is, a molten mass (save for a shell a few miles thick on the outside), or it may be solid and cool all the way through from London to Sydney. However it may be, we can *do* nothing about it. So let the scientific chaps go on speculating to their hearts' content; the world will keep revolving as usual, and we shall have to continue picking up our living from its surface.

Recently in my reading I have come upon articles in certain medical journals—uncanny, uninteresting publications that they are, for non-professional perusal—going to show that it is *not the heart* which impels the blood through the body, but the chemical action of oxygen inhaled by the lungs. A prodigious discovery, if it is a discovery at all.

Yet what odds would it make? None whatever. Fair women would blush by the help of the capillaries as of old, and we should tie rags around cut fingers just the same. It follows, my brethren, that some things may be mysteries to the end of the chapter, and no harm done, and others may differ without disturbing the serenity of our passing days—a most soothing reflection.

But the advantage or otherwise of a person's food agreeing or disagreeing with him is *not* a mere matter of opinion. There is only one way to look at that. As a whole, food *must* agree with us, and we with it, or we are ruined. A lady of Sheffield, Mrs. S. A. Smith, suffered a long, wearisome, and costly illness, simply because her food failed to agree with her. For three years she was weak and wretched on account of it. The light and pleasure went out of her life. She needed to eat, of course, just as she needed to breathe; yet, after every meal—commonly of light things taken in small quantities, and slowly—she was immediately seized with pains in the stomach, the chest, and the left side. Was not this a hard recompense for doing what nature compelled her to do—to eat?

Any act which causes pain is performed as seldom as possible, and as incompletely. For who wants to suffer?

Eating so little—not half as much as her body called for—Mrs. Smith lost flesh and strength. Necessarily. Draw more money out of the bank than you deposit, and presently the bank returns your cheques marked "No funds." To be sure. Nobody can make twice two equal five.

"I got to be so feeble I could scarcely get about," says the lady. "I was like this for three years from the spring of 1893—being worse in the spring than at other seasons. What to do more than I had done, I didn't know, when one day, my aunt, Mrs. William Andrew, of Willoughton, urged me to take Mother Seigel's Syrup. After having done so for a short time, the complaint—indigestion—was better, and soon it wholly disappeared. I am now entirely cured, and strong and hearty as I was before my illness came upon me. You may rest assured that after so fortunate an experience with Mother Seigel's Syrup I recommended it to all my friends, and in sending you this short statement it is my wish that you should print it for the good of others if you so desire."—S. A. Smith, 44 Ditchingham Road, Sheffield, June 3rd, 1898.

"In April of this year (1898)," says another, "my health began to fail. I felt drowsy, and tired with the least exertion. After every meal I had oppression at the chest and sides, and a great deal of pain. Whatever food I took *disagreed with me*, and I grew weak. I am a dressmaker, and when at my work I had so great pain I could hardly bear it. I tried all the usual medicines for indigestion, but got worse and worse. One day in July I read about Mother Seigel's Syrup, and got a bottle of Mr. Hattersley, chemist, West India Dock Road, and in a few days felt better. After taking a second bottle I was cured, and have been well ever since.—(Miss) Minnie Wyatt, 46 West India Dock Road, London, E., October 14th, 1898.

Yes, it is true, health and life depend on a perfect agreement between ourselves and our food. This is not a matter of opinion. It is a vital and living relationship, and nothing does so much to promote the agreement as the frequent and timely use of Mother Seigel's Syrup.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Fry's PURE CONCENTRATED Cocoa.

300 Gold Medals, &c.

A half teaspoonful is sufficient to make a cup of most delicious Cocoa.